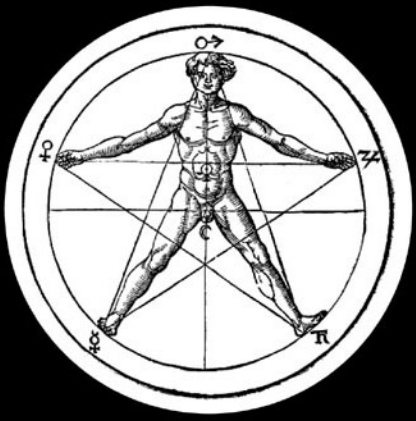
THE LANGUAGE OF DEMONS AND ANGELS

CORNELIUS AGRIPPA'S OCCULT PHILOSOPHY



by

CHRISTOPHER I. LEHRICH

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THE LANGUAGE OF DEMONS AND ANGELS

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THE LANGUAGE OF DEMONS AND ANGELS

Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy

BY

CHRISTOPHER I. LEHRICH

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The cover image shows the harmony and proportion of the human body with respect to the seven heavenly bodies, demonstrating the theory of the microcosm. From *De occulta philosophia* 2.27, 331/347

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Vos igitur, doctrinae et sapientiae filii, perquirite in hoc libro colligendo nostram dispersam intentionem quam in diversis locis proposuimus et quod occultatum est a nobis in uno loco, manifestum fecimus illud in alio, ut sapientibus vobis patefiat. Vobis enim solis scripsimus. . . .

You, therefore, sons of wisdom and learning, search diligently in this book, gathering together our dispersed intentions, which in divers places we have propounded; and what is hid in one place, we make manifest in another, that it may appear to you wise men. For, for you only have we written. . . .

— Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim

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ABBREVIATIONS

DOP	*De occulta philosophia libri tres*, in *Opera*, 1.1-499; also in a critical edition, ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992); also an English translation by J.F. (London, 1651); reprint, ed. and annotated by Donald Tyson (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1993). References are in the form: book:chapter, page in Perrone Compagni edition/page in Tyson edition; thus (*DOP* II:5, 258/245).
De vanitate	*De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium*, in *Opera,* 2.1-314; also in an English translation *Of the Vanitie and Vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*, trans. James Sanford (London:1569); reprint, ed. Catherine M. Dunn (Northridge, CA: California State University Foundation, 1974). References are in the form: chapter, page in *Opera* /page in Dunn; thus (*De vanitate* 17, 46/65). I have regularized the English spelling in *Of the Vanitie*.
Epistolae	*Epistolae ad familiares, libri VII*, in *Opera*, 2.593-1073.
Opera	*Opera, quaecumque hactenus vel in luem prodierunt, vel inveniri potuerunt omnia in duos tomos concinne digesta . . .,* 2 vols. (Lyon, s.a. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970).
Compagni	Notes and introduction to critical edition of *DOP*.
Morley	Henry Morley, *Cornelius Agrippa. The Life of Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Doctor and Knight, Commonly known as a Magician,* 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856).

Nauert	Charles G. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).
Prost	Auguste Prost, *Les sciences et les arts occultes au XVIe siècle. Corneille Agrippa. Sa vie et ses oeuvres*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1881-82; reprint Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1965).
Van der Poel	Marc van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and his Declamations*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 77 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997).
W	Juvenile Draft of *DOP*, noted interlinearly in Perrone Compagni.

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Cover image and Figure 2 courtesy Brown University Library.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> 'Tis Magic, Magic that hath ravished me.
> Then, gentle friends, aid me in this attempt;
> And I . . .
> . . . . . .
> Will be as cunning as Agrippa was,
> Whose shadows made all Europe honour him.
> —Christopher Marlowe

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535), as befits a great magician, left behind him a number of mysteries for posterity. In two letters to his friends, in which he discussed the progress of his great treatise on magic *De occulta philosophia libri tres*[1] [Three Books of Occult Philosophy, hereafter *DOP*], Agrippa wrote of a "secret key" to the occult philosophy, a key which would be revealed only to his closest friends.[2] In the latter half of the sixteenth century, it was commonly believed that this "key" referred to a text of black magic spuriously attributed to Agrippa,[3] thus lending credence to the legends of Agrippa the black magician, which in turn led to Agrippa's importance as a source for the Faust legends. But if the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* was certainly a spurious work, what *was* Agrippa's secret key to the occult philosophy?

Agrippa, one of the most influential magical thinkers of the Renaissance, was for the next two centuries continually cited (positively or negatively) along with Paracelsus as a founding thinker of the magical

---

[1] *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (Cologne, 1531/33); see Abbreviations (page ix above) for complete details of references to *DOP*.

[2] "Clavis reservare." *Epistolae*, 3, 56 (22 January, 1524), 759-60; and 5, 14 (24 September, 1527), 873-75. See also Marc Van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and his Declamations* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 81-2.

[3] *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae liber quartus de occulta philosophia, seu de cerimoniis magicis. Cui accesserunt, Elementa magica Petri de Abano, philosophi*, Marburg, 1559; in *Opera* 1, 527-61 this is *De Caeremoniis Magicis liber, sed, ut putatur, spurius: qui Quartus Agrippae de Occulta Philosophia habetur.*

schools of thought. Despite this, modern scholars have had great difficulty uncovering anything of value or importance in his greatest work, *DOP*.

After a lifetime of work on Giordano Bruno and John Dee, Dame Frances Yates finally settled on Agrippa as the touchstone, if not the key, to the mysteries of Renaissance magic. In an earlier work, she had apologized for devoting a chapter to Agrippa despite the fact that *DOP* "does not fully give the technical procedures, nor is it a profound philosophical work, as its title implies. . . ."[4] In one of her last published articles, however, she commented:

> The extraordinary strength of the influence of Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* has not yet been fully realized. It was an influence which operated in diverse ways with differing results. It encouraged Dee's Cabalistical angel-conjuring. It encouraged Bruno's magical mnemonics. It was central not only to the spread of Renaissance magic but also to the reaction against it.[5]

This apparent change of heart conceals a crucial point in modern assessments of Agrippa: while it is undeniable *that* he was influential, modern scholarship has been unable to explain *why* he was influential. The onus of the present analysis of *DOP* is to give an explanation for this importance by demonstrating the philosophical complexity and interest of a great magician's work. Thus this is a search for Agrippa's "secret key" in the text of *DOP* itself.

Theory and Method

While Agrippa is most directly relevant for scholars of Renaissance intellectual history and history of science, this work is not directed solely to such scholars. Indeed, I want to show that the methods and ideas of other disciplines can contribute to the analysis of Renaissance magic. In particular, I hope to use Agrippa's work to reopen some central definitional questions in the discipline of the history of religions. Finally, I intend to demonstrate the important contiguity of Renaissance magical

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[4] Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 130.

[5] Frances Yates, "Renaissance Philosophers in Elizabethan England: John Dee and Giordano Bruno," in *Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays, volume 1* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 221.

thinking to modern philosophical debates about interpretation and meaning, thus adding (at least) some additional material for reflection.

In order to explain and synthesize these goals, it is necessary to give some critical account of the various methods applied. I subdivide them into three groups: history of religions, history of ideas, and textual criticism.

Anthropology and History of Religions

On the face of it, it seems as though a necessary preliminary to an analysis of Renaissance magical texts would be a definition of magic. Unfortunately, the question of such a definition has a long and troubled history and now seems more or less moribund. Like many cemetery residents, however, it is "not dead, only sleeping," and haunts many facets of contemporary discussion in the history of religions and anthropology. In what follows, I summarize these arguments about definitions, then propose a way of reopening the question more profitably.

The classic description of the problem was Malinowski's phrase, "magic, science, and religion" in the eponymous essay.[6] How does magic relate to these other modes of belief, thought, and behavior? More broadly, what *is* magic? We can break down the answers into three categories, which I term *proto-science*, *illicit religion*, and *social cleavage*.

The notion that magic and witchcraft have some relationship with rationality or science was perhaps most famously formulated by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*: "In short, magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art."[7] After discussing the "laws" which underlie the magician's "logic," Frazer tells us that these are ultimately based upon the "principles of association"; in ringing prose, he argues that these principles

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[6] Bronislaw Malinowski, "Magic, Science, and Religion," in *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1948; reprint, 1992), 17-92.

[7] Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1 vol. abridged edition (New York and London: Macmillan, 1922; reprint, 1963), 13.

> are excellent in themselves, and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science.[8]

Despite this negative comparison, it should not be thought that Frazer had nothing positive to say about magic. By defining magic in terms of such laws as "contagion" and "homeopathy,"[9] by discussing magicians as "men of the keenest intelligence and the most unscrupulous character" who in spite and because of their deceptions have often "been most beneficent in their use of [their power],"[10] he brought to the fore several issues which would haunt scholars for the next century:

(1) Is there not a certain rationality, however defined, or application of rational principles, which inheres in magical practices?

(2) Does magic have some historical or analogical relation to modern science? Does it have such a relation to religion?

(3) What status can we attribute to the claims of magicians; in other words, is a magician, in general, a "sorcerer who sincerely believes in his own extravagant pretensions" or a "deliberate impostor"?

Frazer's own opinions on these issues are easily catalogued and, in the main, set aside. First, while there is certainly a "rationality" to these practices, "the primitive magician knows magic only on its practical side; he never analyses the mental processes on which his practice is based, never reflects on the abstract principles involved in his actions."[11] However rational the principles dredged up by the "philosophic student" to explain these practices, the practitioner cannot be said to be a "scientist," i.e. a rational, careful thinker. On the second question, Frazer argues the famous evolutionary theory (similar to that of E.B. Tylor), that magic leads to religion, which in turn leads to science. Finally, he argues forcefully that the successful magician is a deliberate fraud, although "if we could balance the harm they do by their knavery against the benefits they confer by their superior sagacity, it might well be found that the good greatly outweighed the evil,"[12] in other words the fact that a magician is a

---

[8] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 57.

[9] "Homeopathic" magic has generally come to be called "sympathetic magic" in later discussions, although for Frazer "sympathy" is the general principle upon which all magic is based.

[10] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 53.

[11] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 13.

[12] Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 53.

fraud does not mean we must discard all respect for him, although we have none for his pretended beliefs.

Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss split radically from Frazer's model. Simply put, they argue that magic is a sort of illicit religion; or rather, that it is similar in some ways to religion, distinguished largely by its anti-religious character:

> Magic takes a sort of professional pleasure in profaning holy things; in its rites, it performs the contrary of the religious ceremony. On its side, religion, when it has not condemned and prohibited magic rites, has always looked upon them with disfavor.[13]

Similarly,

> A magical rite is any rite which does not play a part in organized cults—it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limits of a prohibited rite.[14]

Thus magic is construed as a social behavior, albeit one whose character is often anti-social. For Mauss, "sympathetic formulas [à la Frazer] . . . will not be sufficient to represent the totality of a rite of sympathetic magic. The remaining elements are not negligible."[15]

The notion of magic as illicit religion has considerably more validity than is (now) generally accepted. So-called magical rituals or practices are commonly denounced by religious authorities, and it is thus difficult to avoid the charge that by accepting emic definitions of magic arising from such denunciations, we implicitly give credence to the illicit religion theory. At the same time, practices apparently extremely similar are valorized by the same authorities as valid modes of religious practice and experience, sometimes even as licit defenses against magic. Luther's denunciation of the doctrine of transubstantiation is in some ways relatively typical: by arguing that the Catholic notion of the mass was "magical" he formulated a powerful assault.

Although Luther's attack on the "magical" practices of Catholicism tends to uphold magic as illicit religion, not all practices conventionally labeled magical fit such a description. Most importantly, solitary

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[13] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Smith (New York and London: Macmillan, 1915; reprint, 1965), 58.

[14] Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (New York: Norton, 1975), 24.

[15] Mauss, *General Theory of Magic*, 98.

practitioners such as witches cannot easily be categorized in this fashion. By shifting the focus of analysis from the practice to its social context, however, Durkheim and Mauss made the first step towards a theory of magic as primarily an artifact of social interactions.

The problematic relationship between "magic" and "religion" eventually led to the invention of what has become the standard anthropological approach to magical behaviors, inaugurated primarily by E.E. Evans-Pritchard in his discussions of the Zande. Evans-Pritchard found an internal distinction between two different types of magic, which he designated "witchcraft" (*mangu*) and "sorcery" (*ngwa*).[16] This was something new—a distinction *within* magic, rather than an exterior one such as homeopathic/contagious. The most important point about this distinction for all later discussions of magic is that sorcery is a technique, something acquired or learned, whereas witchcraft is inherent in the witch:

> Azande believe that some people are witches and can injure them in virtue of an inherent quality. A witch performs no rite, utters no spell and possesses no medicines. *An act of witchcraft is a psychic act.*[17]

As Mary Douglas put it,

> Azande witches were thought to be dangerous without knowing it; their witchcraft was made active simply by feelings of resentment or grudge. The accusation attempted to regulate the situation by vindicating one and condemning the other rival.[18]

Douglas (and also Victor Turner) correctly points to the accusation as the essential issue in Evans-Pritchard's witchcraft definition: since witches do not necessarily know that they are such, acts of witchcraft are often unwitting. Thus in a consideration of witchcraft, the only evidence that it has occurred is that an accusation is made and sustained (usually by oracle).

Before moving on to consider the line of debate which followed, I want to note that all this applies only to Evans-Pritchard's notion of witchcraft; it has essentially no bearing whatever on what he called sorcery (*ngwa*), a

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[16] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (London: Oxford, 1937). In fact, Evans-Pritchard originally used this distinction only between forms of harmful magic, but that element of precision was eventually blurred away.

[17] Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*, 21 (emphasis mine).

[18] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966; ARK, 1984), 103.

point often forgotten. For him, the idea of figuring out the underlying rationality of an overt magical act is an application of what he called the "if I were a horse" mentality, of naively imagining oneself in the magician's shoes, which mentality he ascribed to Tylor, Frazer, and Malinowski. Instead, Evans-Pritchard focused on effects, believing that "for the social anthropologist, religion is what religion does."[19] Given this presupposition, he simply focused on accusations and hence on witchcraft, rather than on the odd practitioner of sorcery per se (except as a specialist in healing or fending off witchcraft).

Since Evans-Pritchard's book on the Zande, the majority of analyses have concentrated on this social role of magic (meaning witchcraft), and thus examine the circumstances of accusations rather than the content of putative magical actions. For the scholar, this simplifies the issue considerably. One need not consider the details of magical acts, examine the exact content of accusations, or most of all ask why someone would attempt magical acts against someone else. This is particularly convenient (and this is a euphemism) when discussing the European witch craze, because it enables the scholar to attack the authorities who sanctioned the witch-burnings without questioning whether they might have had, in some instances, a legitimate case. In other words, the question of whether an accused witch might have actually performed magical acts becomes irrelevant, and the authorities who condemn the witch can be denounced for their oppressive behavior. But however much we deplore the punishment, it is theoretically possible that at least a few condemned witches might have been guilty as charged.

While recent studies of the witch-craze take seriously the content of the accusations,[20] very few consider the possibility that some witches might actually have practiced magic,[21] nor have they shown much interest in performed magical acts. Instead, the focus is on a content-less "witchcraft," where no act is involved—only an accusation. This approach has certain problematic ramifications, of which Jonathan Z. Smith[22] lists five:

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[19] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 120.

[20] Particularly the excellent works of Carlo Ginzburg and those influenced by him.

[21] Consider, for example, the argument which raged around Chadwick Hansen's book on Salem, which suggested that some of those involved actually practiced magic. *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York: George Braziller, 1969).

[22] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, eds., *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 13-27.

(1) It is extremely rare that the "necessary" sociological data are available, especially when dealing with the past rather than modern ethnographies;

(2) One tends to assume that the magician is disempowered in some manner, and thus the accusation sustained because the powerful accuse the powerless, as in the witch craze;[23]

(3) This focus ignores the possibility that someone might actually practice magic;

(4) The scholar cannot explain or analyze professional magicians or their beliefs and practices; and

(5) We are unable to get beyond the native usage of the term "magic" and produce an effective second-order explanatory terminology, because there is essentially no data for magic.

While the "social cleavage" theory of magic is very effective for understanding certain types of data, it seems that many forms of magic fall outside the scope of this theory, particularly those which involve documented magical practices.

If we wish to analyze magical *practices* rather than accusations, we are forced to return to the problem of rationality and focus on the internal (symbolic) structure of the magical act. The issue is traditionally whether this structure is "rational" or "coherent," and generally focuses on the problem of falsification: if a magical act is supposed to produce some effect, and if, so far as the outside observer can discern, the act has no mechanism by which to do so causally, why does magic not die out? How can intelligent people continue to believe that their magic will have effects when this claim is so clearly falsifiable?

Frazer's answer was that the magician has a whole host of prefabricated excuses—counter-magic, slight errors in casting—but then Frazer assumed that the magician is more or less a clever fraud. For him, magic does not die out because magicians deceive people into perpetuating it.

Malinowski's response is not much more satisfactory. His mimetic explanation of magic argues that the magician imitates the effect he wants to cause. Because the magician becomes subjectively and emotionally involved in his actions by "acting the part," the action produces a psychological equivalent of the desired effect in the practitioner (i.e. it is

[23] I would add that this analytical approach tends to *effect* disempowerment, by treating the accused as though they had no social agency.

cathartic of the desire which provoked the magical act), and thus no falsification occurs. Following Evans-Pritchard's remarks,[24] we might ask if this does not imply a kind of idiocy or childishness: if I punch a wall because I am angry at someone, I do not for a moment believe that the person in question has been punched.

There have been few recent attempts to answer these questions. Perhaps the most important is Stanley Tambiah's move to Austin's speech-act theory, in which the words of a magic spell are granted power as "performative utterances," like the speech-act of christening a ship.[25] This approach (if extended in a more sophisticated manner) has certain potential advantages, as we shall see in chapter four below. It permits a contextual understanding of certain types of "magical" behavior while elevating the content of magical speech to the status of a datum, and it neatly blocks off the "if I were a horse" approach. Above all, the turn towards Austin removes the difficulty of the magician-as-charlatan: there is no need to believe that a deliberate (as opposed to unwitting) magician, if intelligent, must necessarily be a fraud.

At the same time, Tambiah's approach ultimately prevents our making the distinctions which are most interesting with regard to magic, such as whether a magical act differs from other acts. After all, if magic is understood simply as "performative utterance," it cannot be distinguished from the many types of such utterances not usually thought of as magical, such as the christening of a ship. In particular, many of the utterances associated with religious ritual would also fit into the category of performative utterance, such that the category of magic becomes useless.[26] If there is to be any utility to the term "magic," as Durkheim and Mauss noted, it must be in some ways distinguishable from religion and science.

Since the objective of the present work is to analyze the content of a magical text by a highly intelligent professional magician, we must move beyond these classic discussions of magic and its methods. Initially, we must be content with Agrippa's definitions of magic, since we have no

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[24] Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, 44-47.

[25] Stanley Jeyarajah Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man*, n.s. 3 (1968), 175-208; "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts," in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979), 113-69.

[26] Smith, "Trading Places," 15.

effective ones of our own. At the same time, I submit that precisely this sort of analysis provides the greatest possibility of constructing a second-order explanatory theory of magic.

Note Smith's terminological classification:

> . . .unlike a word such as "religion," "magic" is not only a second-order term, located in academic discourse. It is as well, cross culturally, a native, first-order category, occurring in ordinary usage which has deeply influenced the evaluative language of the scholar. Every sort of society appears to have a term (or, terms) designating some modes of ritual activities, some beliefs, and some ritual practitioners as dangerous, and/or illegal, and/or deviant. (Even some texts, conventionally labeled "magical" by scholars, themselves contain charms and spells against what the text labels "magic.") . . . Moreover, it is far from clear that, in many cases, these native distinctions can be properly rendered, in all their nuances, by the common English terms "magic," "witchcraft," "sorcery."[27]

Smith here suggests that "magic" is in some way a "cross-cultural" native terminology, while at the same time noting that the terminologies may not be entirely commensurate with "magic." In addition, as noted earlier, he wants to distinguish between how "they" define magic and how modern scholars should define it:

> Giving primacy to native terminology yields, at best, *lexical* definitions which, historically and statistically, tell how a word is used. But, lexical definitions are almost always useless for scholarly work. To remain content with how "they" understand "magic" may yield a proper description, but little explanatory power. How "they" use a word cannot substitute for the *stipulative* procedures by which the academy contests and controls second-order, specialized usage.[28]

Although in a broad sense magic may often be a "native, first-order category," it is *precisely* so only in one case: the debates and texts about magic in early modern Europe. What is more, these debates are powerfully constitutive of the modern usage of such terms as "magic," both in and out of the academy, because of the historical continuity of those debates to the scientific revolution and the invention of the academy, not to mention their relevance to such texts as Goethe's *Faust*.

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[27] Smith, "Trading Places," 17.
[28] Smith, "Trading Places," 20.

If it is recognized that every translation of a term involves a comparison, i.e. that translating the Zande term *ngwa* as "sorcery" means comparing the Zande usage of *ngwa* with the modern English "sorcery," then we are led to a peculiar conclusion: every translation of a non-European term as "magic," as well as every attempt to define a second-order "magic," is necessarily a comparison with a number of rather poorly understood practices in (particularly) early modern Europe.

Thus the analysis of European magical history is a necessary preliminary to the definition of magic as a second-order scholarly term. While we must eventually separate the second-order usage from its history, it is impossible to effect this separation until we have a clearer idea of what is being separated from what.

For example, it is worth noting that essentially all modern attempts to define "magic" have worked from the assumption that there are relatively few *types* of magic. In the Renaissance, as we shall see with Agrippa, there were understood to be a great many different types of magic, such as natural magic, demonic magic, mathematical magic, ceremonial magic, witchcraft, and so forth, all fairly distinct in methods and objectives. This goes some way towards explaining our inability to make everything conventionally labeled as "magic" conform to a single theoretical structure: only modern academics have ever believed that all types of magic were so conformable.

The History of Ideas

In order to revive the definition of magic as a scholarly issue, it is necessary to understand the history of the term and the debates which surrounded it; this analysis of *DOP* should go some way toward improving that understanding. To achieve this, *DOP* must be understood in its historical context, particularly the context of debates about magic.

Interpreting those debates is not simple, however, and brings up the entire vexed historiography of Renaissance intellectual currents. The discussion which follows is by no means exhaustive, being limited to a few closely related historiographical approaches which have been applied to specifically magical problems.

The more traditional approach, associated particularly with historians of science and of philosophy, concentrates heavily on issues of source and influence, and evidences a desire to situate the object of study within a chronological trajectory. Thus analysis of a given work is primarily

effected through examination of (1) the author's sources, and (2) the scientific or philosophical developments in which that author participated.

In the case of Agrippa, this trajectory has been plotted by Charles Nauert in his *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*,[29] and ably supplemented and expanded by Paola Zambelli in a great many articles. The chronology of Agrippa's life is as clearly determined as it is likely to be, barring the discovery of as yet unsuspected documents. Agrippa's sources for *DOP* have been carefully detailed by Vittoria Perrone Compagni in her critical edition,[30] and the earlier massive annotations of Karl Anton Nowotny are still useful.[31] Although little study has focused on *DOP*'s influence on later generations, despite Yates's call to action quoted above, nods in this direction have appeared in works on such figures as Dee, Bruno, and Robert Fludd.

In spite of this wealth of scholarship, *DOP* remains mysterious, largely because the work is difficult to situate within a known intellectual current such as science or philosophy. That is, *DOP*'s relevance to the history of science is difficult to determine, inasmuch as it constantly bumps against the edges of modern accounts of the scientific revolution without having had much apparent direct influence. With regard to philosophy, Agrippa's influence on thinkers such as Montaigne is well established, but *DOP*'s role is unclear—it is the Pyrrhonism of *De vanitate* which so impressed Montaigne, and we do not know whether he ever read *DOP*.

We thus face a conundrum. On the one hand, we know that Agrippa, and particularly *DOP*, had considerable influence upon at least two centuries of magical thinking; on the other, we have been unable to situate the author within an historical lineage that justifies this importance.

Here I argue for a move away from this methodology. The approach in question is to some degree teleological, treating an author's thought in terms of the disciplines which ultimately emerged from the lineage in which that author participated. Historians of philosophy, for example, commonly analyze magical philosophy in light of the history of philosophy more broadly construed, as it moved towards Descartes, Bacon, and Hobbes. This mode of scholarship derives at least partially from a reaction against the earlier and more obviously teleological model of (especially) the

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[29] Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965.

[30] Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992.

[31] *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, facsimile reprint of Cologne 1533 edition, ed. Karl Anton Nowotny (Graz: Akademische Druk-u. Verlaganstalt, 1967).

history of science, which tended to "grade" early scientists on their contributions to scientific knowledge. In that model, a figure such as Paracelsus could be considered scientific when his ideas were both scientifically accurate and new, and pre- or proto-scientific when inaccurate.[32] More recently, such scholars as Walter Pagel and Allen Debus have revised the historiography of Paracelsus, such that his importance to the scientific revolution depends upon his influence upon the intellectual currents which produced that revolution; for example, Paracelsus's work promoted a desire to look at nature anew rather than accepting Aristotelian and Galenic authority.

While this important historiographical shift has led us to revise our thinking about magical thinkers such as Paracelsus, Dee, and Bruno, this methodology necessarily focuses on the thinker rather than the texts, and on the influence of the texts rather than their content. This focus has dramatically improved our understanding of the intellectual currents of the Renaissance, but Agrippa has remained peripheral. Thus if the early approach denied Agrippa any value, more recent scholarship has recognized his importance without being able to explain it. I argue that, given the influence of Agrippa's writings, we must assume that later magical thinkers found something of importance in their *content*; thus we are led ineluctably toward textual analysis as the next logical stage in the historiography of Renaissance magic.

A less traditional approach is that associated with Frances Yates, who in the 1960s and '70s inaugurated the most important rethinking of Renaissance magical thought in modern scholarship. Her methods do not initially seem fundamentally different from those discussed above: the same structure of sources, influences, and situation in an intellectual current is apparent in the majority of her works. However, a comparison of methodologies quickly reveals subtle but radical differences.

In her masterpiece *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Yates unravels Bruno's ideas in two stages. First, she presents Bruno's predecessors in the "Hermetic" movement, moving from Hermes Trismegistus

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[32] E.g. A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall. In *The Scientific Renaissance 1450-1630* (New York: Harper, 1962; reprint, 1966), 167-8, the latter remarks: "The area to which magic could be and was applied in the sixteenth century was still very great; it is fascinating to observe the way in which, out of the muddled mysticism of sixteenth-century thought and practice, the scientifically valid problems were gradually sifted out to leave only the dry chaff of superstition."

himself through Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Agrippa, and on to "Religious Hermetism in the Sixteenth Century." Having thus situated Bruno within an intellectual tradition, she gives a biographical and intellectual account of the Nolan thinker's short life. The denouement of her book discusses the fate of Hermetism after 1600 (when Bruno was burned at the stake), thus gesturing towards the influence of Bruno upon his immediate successors.

The critical point of departure, emblematic of the Warburg school, is the notion of a "Hermetic movement." Rather than situate Bruno in the history of science or philosophy as commonly construed, she places him in a previously unknown intellectual movement. This movement and its history are traced with considerable care in Yates's work, with periodic redefinitions—the "Hermetic" movement becomes the "Hermetic-cabalist" movement, and so forth. Having inserted this movement into Renaissance intellectual history, she argues that it has significant points of contact with the history of science and philosophy. These contacts in turn lead to a demand for a drastic revision of the historiography of the period—after all, if prior histories of Renaissance thought did not even discern the presence of the movement, much less its purposes, then there must be something terribly wrong with those prior histories.

There is a complex and problematic methodology here, which unfortunately Yates herself never made explicit. In a fascinating article on the methodology of the Warburg school,[33] Carlo Ginzburg notes a standard assessment of this method as being based upon "philological concreteness and precision; objectivity *and the accompanying rejection of theoretical presuppositions and abstract hypothetical generalizations*; and interdisciplinary approaches, the shattering of academic compartments, or those simply dictated by tradition."[34] But this school has produced two major theorists, Erwin Panofsky and E.H. Gombrich, and by a brief examination of the former's art-historical methods, we can gain some insight into the problems and strengths of what has become the dominant strain of scholarship of Renaissance magical currents.

Panofsky, as is well known, divides the analysis of artistic images into a tripartite structure: pre-iconographical description, iconographical

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[33] Carlo Ginzburg, "From Aby Warburg to E. H. Gombrich: A Problem of Method," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method,* trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989; reprint, 1992), 17-59.

[34] Ginzburg, "Aby Warburg," 25-26 (emphasis mine), paraphrasing Eugenio Garin, "Introduction" to Fritz Saxl, *La storia delle immagini*, trans. G. Veneziani (Bari, 1965).

analysis, and iconological interpretation.[35] The object of study is in each case different, as is the purpose and method.

"Pre-iconographical description" has as its object the "primary or natural subject matter," that is, "the world of motifs." Based on a relatively universal human experience, one interprets the image. For example, the pre-iconographical subject matter of a given painting might be a man crucified upon a cross. The viewer can identify the man as such, can identify the cross as a wooden, cross-shaped object, and can recognize the man's facial expression as agony, ecstasy, or whatever: "Everybody can recognize the shape and behavior of human beings, animals and plants, and everybody can tell an angry face from a jovial one."[36]

Iconographical analysis adds historico-cultural knowledge to the interpretation: by moving to iconography, we identify the crucified man as Jesus. Panofsky here moves from what Charles Peirce would call "iconic" relations, based on resemblance, to "symbolic" relations, which are purely conventional in character. He uses the example of an Australian bushman, who "would be unable to recognize the subject of a Last Supper; to him it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party."[37]

With the move to "iconology," Panofsky's method becomes at once highly problematic and filled with rich potential, and it is here that we begin to see Yates's method. Iconological interpretation seeks "those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion—qualified by one personality and condensed into one work." By means of this iconology, Panofsky wishes to consider Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper "as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, [such that] we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms. . . ."[38]

Iconology of this sort marks the entire Warburg school (with the possible exception of Gombrich): it is the attempt not only to understand some object (a text, a painting) as a product of its historical context, but also as in some manner *representative* of that context, and thereby to

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[35] Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers In and On Art History* (New York, 1955; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 26-54 *et passim.*

[36] Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 33.

[37] Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 35.

[38] Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology," 30-1.

interpret context by means of the object. The object becomes a document for the understanding of history, rather than an isolated aesthetic piece.

In the history of ideas more generally, one crucial benefit of this "iconological" method is that it annuls the older "genius" approach, in which a thinker such as Descartes or Newton was represented as an isolated genius. By presupposing that the object of analysis is a document for understanding history, the scholar is forced to read the *Meditations* as related to the historical-cultural situation in which Descartes lived and participated.

Put so broadly, it is difficult to argue the contrary position, that documents should be forcibly removed from historical context. But is this really the only contrary position? If we examine the presuppositions of iconology, and the Warburg school more generally, the notions of "culture" and "history" are relatively unexamined. In addition, a complex circularity appears in the heart of the method, which may or may not be resolvable. For purposes of brevity, I restrict this critique to three points.

First, if the Last Supper is a document for understanding the Italian High Renaissance, it is required that there *be* an Italian High Renaissance. That is, this movement must be singular, concrete, and readily definable. So for every object to be studied, it is necessary that we discover a definable context in which to fit it. Two points follow immediately for a study of Agrippa's *DOP*: (1) we cannot use *DOP* as a document for understanding *magic*, since as we have seen *magic* is not singular, concrete, or readily definable; (2) we must situate *DOP* within some movement of which it would be typical, even though such a movement is not previously known. Frances Yates's notion of "the Hermetic movement" is an attempt at such positioning: by postulating the existence of such a movement, texts like Agrippa's can be seen as typical rather than peculiar.

This leads to the second problem with this Warburg method: if we postulate a "Hermetic movement" so as to make Agrippa's work typical, then the only documentation of that movement is precisely works like Agrippa's. In other words, the movement is defined and described on the basis of the very documents which it was postulated to explain. In art criticism, the same problem obtains: if we interpret a painting in light of its context, then try to interpret the context in light of the painting, we are in grave danger of finding only confirmation for our prior beliefs about the painting and the historical context. At its extreme extent, this method leads to a *Geistesgeschichte* of "the true spirit of the Renaissance," or

alternatively to the wholesale invention of grand, secret movements in history, such as Yates's "Rosicrucian enlightenment."[39]

A third difficulty appears in Panofsky's remark that iconology desires to understand the Last Supper "as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude. . . ." But which one? Or all at the same time? The several possibilities listed (and one could adduce many others) lead to another circularity: if some aspect of the Last Supper does not fit our understanding of the Italian High Renaissance, we can simply conclude that this aspect is a datum for understanding Leonardo's personality, moving us from history to psychology. And even supposing that one had great confidence in psychological interpretations of historical figures, what data could we adduce for such an interpretation apart from precisely those aspects of Leonardo's work which do not fit previous understandings of his historical context? Similarly, Yates is bound to interpret supposedly Hermetic texts entirely in that context. For example, she argues that Agrippa must have written his retraction of *DOP* in order to appease church authorities, who were supposedly anti-Hermetic; that the remainder of *De vanitate*, in which the retraction appeared, is violently and even viciously anti-clerical is irrelevant for Yates, because the only documentation she has for a "Hermetic movement" is the texts of such men as Agrippa, and hence they *must* be interpreted in that light.

We are dealing here with problems of interpretation, and indeed with the theory of interpretation. The difficulties of the Warburg method are not the result of "fuzzy thinking" or a lack of precision; they are fundamental problems which arise in the study of any cultural product, made more apparent by selecting as the object of study a nearly undefinable idea such as magic. If earlier it seemed that Agrippa would provide a window onto the history of "magic" as a term, it now seems that the use of Agrippa as a window onto *anything* is riddled with insoluble difficulties.

I do not claim to have a solution to these problems, a "secret key" to occult philosophy or magic. Instead, I suggest that these problems are precisely where analysis needs to begin. In other words, I suggest that problems of interpretation are precisely the problems with which we need to investigate Agrippa. By considering Agrippa's magic in terms of our

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[39] Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972; ARK reprint, 1986). See Brian Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," *Journal of Modern History* 51 (1979), 287-316 for a devastating critique of this work.

own deep concerns about the nature of meaning, interpretation, and language, we can at last find common ground.

Textual Methods for the Study of Renaissance Magic

I have argued that careful textual analysis of Agrippa (for example) is necessary to advance understanding of Renaissance magic and of the definitional problem of magic in general, and thus some discussion of textual-critical methodology is crucial. But this brief discussion of hermeneutics, deconstruction, and semiotics is not intended merely to introduce and summarize the means by which I will effect my analysis of Agrippa. On the contrary, these very methodologies can themselves be clarified and advanced by application to Agrippa. In the present volume, critical theories are not simple lenses for examination, but rather philosophical ideas *in conversation* with the text, thus negating a fallacious distinction between "primary" and "secondary" sources, "object of study" and "method for study."

When reading Agrippa, one cannot avoid being struck by the centrality of linguistic and textual issues. Like so many Christian thinkers in all ages, Agrippa uses the terminology of "two books" written by God for the instruction of humanity: Scripture and Nature. Within the field of the Renaissance history of science, much time has been devoted to the question of reading Nature, with particular emphasis on its relationship to the development of modern science.[40] *DOP*, however, does not seem to privilege either book over the other, but rather describes techniques for reading both books, separately and in parallel, and also suggests the possibility of *writing* in (or at least parallel to) these two books. Book I of *DOP*, devoted to Natural Magic, focuses almost entirely on the book of Nature; Books II and III, on Mathematical and Ceremonial Magic, take up various abstruse exegetical techniques, some derived from Kabbalah, others from Christian theological and philosophical sources. All of these methods seem to be both exegetical and, if you will, *in*-getical, based on active *writing*, in addition to the semi-passive *reading* of exegesis: magical hermeneutics—hermetic hermeneutics, we might say—is a primary issue

[40] An obvious example is Allen G. Debus and Michael T. Walton, eds., *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998).

in the work. In order to examine the nature of magical practice in *DOP*, then, it will be necessary to take up these techniques of magical reading and writing, and my own hermeneutics must be guided by those of the text. In reading *DOP*, then, we are reading a book about reading.

But who is reading what? All modern formulations of the dynamics of interpretation agree that the intentions and ideas of the author are inaccessible; in addition, I have argued above that this interpretation of *DOP* must turn away from Agrippa and towards the text itself—to use Paul Ricoeur's lovely formulation, the analytical focus of the reading is in fact necessarily upon "the world in front of the text." Thus the issue of author largely drops from consideration, to be replaced by an implied or projected authorial (or other) voice. For *DOP*, the projected author is a magus, one who has to some degree succeeded in the objectives of magic, thus establishing his credentials as an authority on magic.

In *DOP*, the magus reads the books of Scripture and Nature—but these texts are not precisely the same as those to which a modern reader has access, but rather projections in the same way as the magus is a projection. For example, the text of Nature as it appears in *DOP* includes occult forces whose reality a modern scientist would not accept. Thus the world in front of *DOP* includes projected texts distinctive to that world, as well as a projected magus who reads and interprets the texts.

Between the projected magus and the projected texts there exists necessarily a hermeneutic circle, an interpretive process of the magus entering the text and returning for philosophical reflection. After all, the magus is a reader of texts, and those texts are both autonomous and to some degree created by the magus in his role as hermeneut. Since this hermeneutic circle is central to the magical perspective of *DOP,* it seems logical that a modern scholar can analyze this projected circle.

The ramifications of this conclusion are considerable. Hermeneutic circles, if analyzed as such, have certain universal characteristics.[41] Neither Agrippa nor the projected magus can avoid these characteristics—pre-understanding, aporia, disjuncture, reflection, etc.—any more than can a modern scholar, although the terminology is of course modern.

Two effects of this method of analysis are particularly worth noting. First, it is difficult to avoid the charge that any interpretation attempts to

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[41] This is not to say that the hermeneutic circle is a universally valid phenomenon, but rather that the attempt to analyze anything *as* such a circle pre-establishes certain characteristics of the analytical object.

"make present" something about the object of interpretation. Traditionally, the notion was that perfect interpretation would make the author's true meaning present; this has been discredited, to be replaced by various theories about the potential presence of some interactively constructed meaning more or less cognate with at least some "real" meaning in the text. The purpose of the analytical method proposed here is somewhat different: by entering into an interpretive relationship with a hermeneutic circle, what is made present is itself a process of making-present. In short, what is reconstructed in this analysis is neither Agrippa nor Agrippa's "real meaning," but rather certain aspects of the logocentrism implied by the world in front of *DOP*.

Second, if the hermeneutic circles of the world in front of *DOP* are an attempt to make something present, it seems clear that the "something" in question is the real intention of the Author of the Texts, i.e. God. To put this another way, the very structure of *DOP* as a hermeneutical endeavor already ensures that the objective of the occult philosophy is to make God's true intentions present to the magus. This has a very specific meaning in Renaissance thought: it can only refer to an attempt to reach some form of mystical unity with God.

Thus, by shifting the object of study from Agrippa to the implicit hermeneutic project in front of *DOP*, we both clarify the magical project of the occult philosophy, and also set that philosophy into direct conversation with modern linguistic and hermeneutic philosophies.

I have raised the haunting specter of "logocentrism" in the preceding discussion; it remains to explain not only what I mean by this but also how (and why) I intend to apply Jacques Derrida's famous idea. Parallel to the search for hermeneutic circles, I plan not to deconstruct *DOP* (or discover how it deconstructs itself), but instead to seek in *DOP* certain fundamental principles of deconstruction. This is not to say that the occult philosophy is deconstruction *avant la lettre*, any more than seeking hermeneutic circles implies that Agrippa is already a post-Gadamerian theorist of hermeneutics. Rather, I argue that Agrippa's magic was part of a philosophical movement which contained within itself the seeds of Derrida's theory of grammatology, though the vagaries of the intellectual history of the early modern period shifted the focus of philosophical reflection away from those seeds until, more or less coincidentally, they resurfaced in (post-) modern times. The Occult Renaissance can perhaps be seen as a point at

which history failed to turn, or at which it turned differently than Agrippa might have hoped.

Logocentrism is the crucial idea here. Derrida argues that the history of western thought has usually granted speech (*logos*) priority over writing, such that speech is understood as a more or less direct representation of thought, while writing is only a representation of speech and hence more distant, more fallen, more false. At the same time, he demonstrates that this idea deconstructs itself: discussions of the primacy of speech cannot avoid the haunting presence of writing. Writing is said to be a "supplement," in the sense that it is an (unnecessary) addition to speech. Yet Derrida notes that "supplement" has a double meaning: a supplement is always a *necessary* addition. For example, the supplementary volumes to a dictionary include entries not in the main volumes, and are necessary for the dictionary to be complete; the supplement is thus external and yet crucial to the entirety of the work.

Derrida's arguments are infamously complex; here I only sketch an outline of part of one particularly relevant version: the essay "Plato's Pharmacy,"[42] which discusses Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* and particularly the section on a supposedly Egyptian myth of the origins of writing.

To summarize the myth briefly, the god Theuth (Thoth, more or less equivalent to Hermes) approaches the king (Thamus/Ammon, king of the gods as well as of Egypt) and offers him the arts which Theuth has invented, particularly the art of writing.

> Theuth said, "This discipline, my King, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories: my invention is a recipe (*pharmakon*) for both memory and wisdom." But the king said, ". . . .[T]his invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written, using the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves rather than, from within, their own unaided powers to call things to mind. So it's not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered. And as for wisdom, you're equipping your pupils with only a semblance of it, not with the truth. . . ."[43]

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[42] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-171.

[43] Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 75 and 102; quoting *Phaedrus*, 274d-275b. I have eliminated all the Greek from the text except the one crucial word *pharmakon*.

The crucial word for Derrida's discussion is *pharmakon* [φάρμακον], meaning both medicine and poison: Theuth brings writing as a *pharmakon*/remedy for memory, but the king recognizes it as a *pharmakon*/poison. Thus for Plato, writing has the appearance of wisdom, truth, and memory, but is in fact destructive of all these, creating a dead semblance of memory and a shadowy imitation of truth. Derrida argues that this *pharmakon* is a supplement in the sense given above: Theuth would not present writing as a medicine if there were no sickness. Thus the invention of writing implies that speech *always already* lacks something, that it is incomplete, that it requires a supplement.

In many of his works, Derrida argues that this logocentric phenomenon, this constant desperate attempt to recapture presence by further supplementation, is part of the long heritage of western philosophy from Plato onward.[44] For our purposes, however, it is significant that his history of philosophy (borrowed from Heidegger) skips the occult philosophies of the Renaissance, presumably because they rarely had much direct influence upon what we now think of as the mainstream of philosophy. But when considering Derrida's philosophy in the context of Renaissance magic, certain peculiarities are interestingly suggestive.

First, it is not coincidental that Theuth, inventor of writing, also invented such arts as astrology, medicine—and magic. In a sense, magic is mythologically bound up with writing; indeed, Renaissance magic (such as Agrippa's) can be read as the ultimate *pharmakon* for the lack of presence. It is hardly surprising that Theuth is generally equated with Hermes, the patron deity as it were of Renaissance magicians.

Second, a unique conjunction occurred in early modern occult philosophy, between classical western philosophies (Neoplatonic and Aristotelian) and Jewish thought, particularly Kabbalah. Kabbalah is (if one can generalize) primarily oriented around *text*, specifically *Hebrew* text. It was commonly accepted that Hebrew was the pre-Babel language, the language of Adam and of God, the language in which Adam named all the animals "and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 3:19). As has been discussed by historians of linguistics

[44] Although it could certainly be argued that this phenomenon is more universal than the history of western "metaphysics," Derrida does not (so far as I know) expand his historical application of the theory except in oblique hints, presumably because he is neither an historian nor an expert on non-western intellectual currents.

and semiotics,[45] this was taken to mean that the Hebrew language was not arbitrary in the linguistic sense: Hebrew words and letters connected to their referents not by cultural convention but by divine fiat.[46] In other words, the occult philosophers saw in Kabbalah an ancient and holy science which *could discern and demonstrate the presence of God in Scripture.*

I suggest, then, that *DOP* can be read as an attempt to solve the problem of logocentrism by an appeal to the *prisca magia*: *DOP*'s magus uses ancient holy magical techniques to make manifest the immanent presence of the Divine in the world. This establishes a communication between the magus and God which relies neither on speech nor text, but on the undifferentiated absolute Word of God (Christ/Logos) by means of which God created the world.

Thus the magical project of *DOP* is one of rising through the spoken and written manifestations of the Word (Nature and Scripture, respectively) to the true, undifferentiated Word, the Word which requires no supplement, which *is itself presence.* If Derrida reminds us that all language is haunted by absence, Agrippa recognizes this problem and seeks a solution in magic, through a kind of reconstructive deconstruction of the universe itself. Which attempt is perhaps the most extreme form of logocentrism possible.

On the opposite extreme, the search for immanent presence in the universe can lead to endless semiosis; the semiotician Umberto Eco calls this "Hermetic drift," and ascribes it to Giordano Bruno and other Hermetic thinkers:

> I shall call Hermetic drift the interpretive habit which dominated Renaissance Hermetism and which is based on the principles of universal analogy and sympathy, according to which every item of the furniture of the world is linked to every other element (or to many) of this sublunar world and to every element (or to many) of the superior world by means of similitudes or resemblances. It is through similitudes that the otherwise occult parenthood

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[45] E.g. Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), and especially Marie-Lucie Demonet, *Les voix du signe: Nature du langage à la Renaissance (1480-1580)* (Paris and Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1992).

[46] This has usually been treated as Cratylism, in which words have meaning naturally rather than culturally. As we shall see in chapter 3, this Renaissance occult theory understands Hebrew words to have meaning because of divine decree, which is importantly distinct from nature (see page 134 below). Furthermore, Agrippa is unusual among Christian Kabbalists in not granting Hebrew absolute primacy (see page 198 below).

> between things is manifested and every sublunar body bears the traces of that parenthood impressed on it as a *signature*.[47]

Here every object is like a word in the Adamic language, having meaning because of its nature, and because of the nature of Nature itself. The difficulty of this type of semiosis is that it is unlimited: if every element is linked to every other, the process of meaning-relations can never end, and no final determination of even a functional meaning can be made.

Considering the previous discussion of Derrida and magic, it should come as no surprise that Eco's other example of "unlimited semiosis" is that which he ascribes to "irresponsible" deconstructionists. For them, the process of supplementation and deconstruction leads to an infinite path without any potential for ending in meaning. That is, the results of any interpretive act are determined by the preconceptions of the interpreter, and have essentially no connection with the object interpreted.[48]

But in Agrippa's magic, as already indicated, there is an end-point: the process of unlimited semiosis is fixed to an unlimited Meaning, i.e. God, because Christ breaks the unending cycle of interpretation as the Incarnate Word. Every element of Creation connects to every other because every element is part of the Divine plan, and hence each piece is an essential element in a single, infinitely large meaning. The object of the occult philosophy thus becomes the search for connections, because these connections are *constitutive of Meaning*. The process of interpreting *DOP* is thus once again a process of following a search for meaning, of interpreting a process of interpretation.

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[47] Umberto Eco, "Unlimited Semiosis and Drift: Pragmaticism vs. 'Pragmatism," in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990; reprint, 1994), 24.

[48] Eco does not tar Derrida himself with this brush; on the contrary, he notes in the already cited essay: "In *Grammatology* [Derrida] reminds his readers that without all the instruments of traditional criticism 'critical production will risk developing in almost any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guard-rail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened* a reading'" (*ibid.*, 37). Eco uses this as support for his contention that "frequently Derrida—in order to stress nonobvious truths—disregards very obvious truths that nobody can reasonably pass over in silence. . . . I think . . .that Derrida takes many of these obvious truths for granted—while frequently some of his followers do not" (*ibid.*, 36). Eco's citation is from *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 158.

Cornelius Agrippa: Life

Agrippa's biography has been written a number of times, most importantly by Charles Nauert,[49] and ably supplemented by several scholars, particularly Paola Zambelli. As the present work is a close reading of *DOP*, the following merely summarizes prior scholarship.

Early Years (1486-1518)

Born in Cologne in 1486 to a family of minor nobility or upper bourgeoisie, Agrippa matriculated in 1499 at the University of Cologne, receiving the *magister artium* in 1502. Considering the traditionalism of the Cologne university, it is no surprise that the iconoclastic Agrippa later criticized the instruction.[50] He learned some astrology from his father, who died in 1519, and it seems certain that Agrippa's abiding interest in esoteric learning began early.[51]

Between 1507 and 1509 he traveled extensively, spending time in Paris and Spain, possibly in service to Emperor Maximilian I. Apparently he also formed or joined a secret society of like-minded occult students, but we have minimal information as he swore an oath of secrecy.[52]

In 1509 Agrippa visited Johannes Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim, a distinguished humanist, theologian, and expert on cryptography and magic, to whom shortly thereafter he sent the complete Juvenile Draft manuscript of *DOP*.[53] Trithemius approved, and encouraged Agrippa to

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[49] Charles G. Nauert, *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965). I will eschew constant citations to this seminal work.

[50] On Cologne's traditionalism, see James V. Mehl, ed., *Humanismus in Köln* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1991), esp. Charles G. Nauert, "Humanists, Scholastics, and the Struggle to Reform the University of Cologne, 1523-25," 39-76.

[51] *Epistolae* 1, 23 (ab D. Ioanni Tritemio, Abbati, 1510), 622: "Hinc concitatus est in me spiritus meus, atque propter ipsam cum admirationem, tum indignationem volui et ego philosophari, non illaudabile opus me facturum existimans, qui ab ineunte aetate semper circa mirabilium effectuum et plenas mysteriorum operationes curiosus intrepidusque extiti explorator."

[52] On Agrippa's secret society, see Nauert, *Agrippa*, 17-25 *et passim*. Paola Zambelli, "Umanesimo magico-astrologico e raggruppamenti segreti nei platonici della preriforma," in *Umanesimo e esoterismo: Atti del V convegno internazionale di studi umanistici, Oberhofen, 16-17 settembre 1960,* ed. Enrico Castelli (Padua, 1960), 157-58, presents a "strong theory" of the society, but cf. Nauert, 318-321, and esp. 321n.100 for a critical assessment.

[53] The copy sent to Trithemius is the source for the Juvenile Draft (*W*). On Trithemius, see Noel Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: SUNY, 1999), and *The Abbott*

continue his studies, though he suggested that the young scholar be circumspect in his discussions.[54] Also in 1509, Agrippa gave lectures on Johannes Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* (1494) at the University of Dôle, on the strength of which he received a doctorate in theology. Unfortunately Jean Catilinet, provincial superior of the Franciscans for Burgundy, denounced Agrippa as a "judaizing heretic" (*haereticum Iudaisantem*). In a pattern that would be typical for Agrippa, he was accused of heresy behind his back, and could not defend himself until later. The defense, in the form of a letter to Catilinet, was dated 1510 but published in 1529.[55]

During 1510, Agrippa was in London, apparently serving secret ends, perhaps on behalf of Maximilian I.[56] At any rate, he studied St. Paul with John Colet, and began a commentary on Romans, not extant. Apart from a few brief trips, however, Agrippa spent 1511 through 1518 in Italy, caught in the French-Italian wars; Agrippa was involved in these military affairs on the side of the Emperor.

During a sojourn at Pavia in 1512 he probably taught a course on the *Symposium*, the inaugural lecture of which survives,[57] and upon returning in 1515 another course on the *Pimander*, the first dialogue of the *Hermetica*.[58] He also wrote *Dialogus de homine*, which survives in fragments, an excursus on the anthropology of Pico's *Heptaplus*.[59]

Trithemius (1462-1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981).

[54] *DOP*, dedicatory epistle (Ioannes Tritemius. . .suo Henrico Cornelio Agrippae), 72/lvii: "Unum hoc tamen te monemus custodire praeceptum, ut vulgaria vulgaribus, altiora vero et arcana altioribus atque secretis tantum communices amicis: da foenum bovi, saccarum psitaco tantum. . . [Yet this one rule I advise you to observe, that you communicate vulgar secrets to vulgar friends, but higher and secret to higher and secret friends only. Give hay to an ox, sugar to a parrot only. . .]"

[55] *Expostulatio cum Ioanne Catilineto super expositionem libri Ioannis Capnionis de verbo mirifico*

[56] *Defensio*, fols. B vi^{r-v}: ". . .quamvis apud Britannos longe aliud et occultissimum quoddam tunc agebam negotium," quoted in Marc van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and his Declamations* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 21n.24. On the Maximilian theory, see e.g. Henry Morley, *Cornelius Agrippa: The Life of Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Doctor and Knight, Commonly known as a Magician*, 2 vols., (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), vol. 1, 228-29 *et passim.*

[57] *Oratio in Praelectionem Convivii Platonis, Amoris laudem continens*, in *Opera*, 2, 1074-88.

[58] The inaugural lecture is *Oratio, habita Papiae in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti, de potestate et sapientia Dei*, in *Opera*, 2, 1089-1101.

[59] The fragments have been edited by Paola Zambelli, "Agrippa di Nettesheim, *Dialogus de homine*, prima edizione a cura di Paola Zambelli," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 13:1 (1958), 47-71.

Agrippa also acquired a patron, Guglielmo Paleologo (1494-1518), Marquis of Monferrato, and to him in 1516 dedicated his most important work of this period, *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (hereafter *De triplici*).[60] During this period Agrippa likely wrote a draft of *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*, which van der Poel suggests should be read as a seventh chapter of *De triplici*; the work was printed in 1529.[61]

At the end of his time in Italy, Agrippa lectured on scripture in Turin, and wrote an oration for a student taking a doctorate in law.[62]

Middle Years (1518-28)

In 1518, Agrippa once more sought a patron. Though briefly involved with Charles III, Duke of Savoy, he took up a position as legal advisor to the free Imperial city of Metz. He also acquired many friends during his time in Germany, and their surviving letters reflect wide-ranging interests.

While in Metz, Agrippa became embroiled in a fight about the legend that Saint Anne was married three times, each time giving birth to a daughter called Mary (the Virgin and two others). Agrippa supported Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples (c.1460-1536) against this theory, and was again accused of heresy—as usual anonymously, making direct confrontation impossible.[63] He immediately wrote a *Defensio* in an angry, sarcastic style which would be typical of his later refutations, rebuttals, and apologies.[64]

The same period saw the famous witch trial, in which Agrippa achieved the acquittal of a woman accused of witchcraft. His victory over Inquisitor Nicolas Savin involved legal and theological arguments on witchcraft, sin, and proper legal process for torture and interrogation of prisoners.[65]

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[60] *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Dei*, in *Opera*, 2, 454-81; partial edition by Paola Zambelli, in Eugenio Garin et al., eds., *Testi umanistici sull' ermetismo. Testi di Ludovico Lazarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto, Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim* (Rome, 1955), 146-62.

[61] Van der Poel, 24-25.

[62] *Oratio pro quodam doctorando*, in *Opera*, 2, 1102-09.

[63] Agrippa wrote to Lefèvre d'Etaples that he had discovered the identity of his persecutor, the Dominican Claude Salin: *Epistolae*, 2, 30 (22 May, 1519), 678.

[64] *Defensio propositionum praenarratarum contra quendam Dominicastrum earundem impugnatorem, qui sanctissimam deiparae virginis matrem Annam conatur ostendere polygamam*; see Van der Poel, 88-91 *et passim* on this work.

[65] The best analysis of the affair is in Wolfgang Ziegeler, "Agrippa von Nettesheim und der Metzer Hexenprozess des Jahres 1519," chapter 6 of *Möglichkeiten der Kritik am Hexen- und Zauberwesen im augehended Mittelalter*, 137-99 (Cologne-Vienna, 1973); see also Charles Zika's discussion in "Agrippa von Nettesheim and his Appeal to the Cologne Council in 1533: the Politics of Knowledge in Early Sixteenth-Century Germany," in Mehl, ed., *Humanismus in Köln*, 119-74, esp. pp.156-75.

Agrippa's involvement in these conflicts made his position untenable. He moved to Cologne in 1520, then to Geneva in 1521, where he worked as a physician. His wife died either in Geneva or on the journey, and was buried in Metz; he took a second wife in Geneva, with whom he had six children. In 1522 he negotiated a position with Charles III, Duke of Savoy, but eventually moved to Freiburg as town physician in 1523.

In 1524, he became physician to Louise of Savoy; unfortunately, they disagreed intensely, as Agrippa was offended by her demands for astrological prognostications, for the popular form of which he had little respect. When Louise left Lyon in 1525, she ordered him to remain, and the royal treasurers stopped paying his salary.

In 1526, Agrippa completed his famous *De vanitate*, a scathing satire on all human knowledge. Some have suggested that its acid pessimism arose from bitter disappointment with the French court, about whose "treachery" he complains in several letters; this is plausible, if simplistic.[66]

Agrippa also published *Declamatio de sacramento matrimonii*, dedicated to the widowed sister of King Francis I, Margaret of Angoulême, duchess of Alençon. Presumably he hoped to regain favor, but instead court theologians criticized the work to the Queen Mother. As usual, the criticism was done behind Agrippa's back, and he could not respond.

Understandably, given his precarious position, Agrippa offered his resignation in July 1527, and left for Antwerp in the end of that year.

Final Years (1528-35)

The journey to Antwerp was delayed, and he arrived in July, 1528; his family joined him in October.[67] Agrippa worked for Margaret of Austria, governor of the Low Countries, and spent a peaceful few years there, apart from the death of his wife in the plague which swept Antwerp in 1529.[68]

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[66] Morley, 2, 152: "If we bear in mind the disappointments and distresses in the midst of which this bitter jest was written, and the life also that prepared the author for his work, we shall know perfectly well the meaning." In *Epistolae* 4: 41 (21 September, 1526), 819, Agrippa complains that "id ipsum tibi repeto, me ab isto Buillione mirum in modum fraudatum. Tuas literas, quas illi ad me deferendas tradidisse scribis, non accepisse me scias: et fratrem eiusdem Bullionis negare, sibi quicquam scriptum, aut commissum."

[67] *Epistolae* 4, 41 (ibid.): "Salutat te charissima coniunx mea, quae laborat duplici tertiana, timeoque admodum, ne ob animi moestitiam labatur in quartanam."

[68] Agrippa apparently worked as a physician, fighting the plague, and it is likely that his experiences here were the source for his *Regimen adversas pestilentiam*.

In 1529, Agrippa received Imperial Privilege to publish several works: *DOP, De vanitate, In Artem brevem Raymundi Lullii Commentaria et Tabula Abbreviata*, and *Orationes et Epistolae.* He also published a volume containing *De nobilitate, Expostulatio, De triplici, De sacramento matrimonii, Dehortatio, De originali peccato*, and *Regimen adversas pestilentiam.*

In September 1530, Agrippa published *De vanitate*; despite the Privilege Margaret worried about its orthodoxy. Without seeking Agrippa's opinion, she sent to the Faculty of Theology at Louvain, whence it was sent to the Emperor's brother Ferdinand, who took exception to its skepticism and wrote about it to the Emperor. The Faculty denounced *De vanitate* on eighteen points, presented to the Imperial Privy Council in (as usual) a secret document. Agrippa, furious that once again he had been attacked without the opportunity to respond, wrote both an angry *Querela* against his accusers and an *Apologia* defending the book.[69] These were eventually published in 1533, anonymously, but *De vanitate* had been publicly condemned by the Sorbonne Faculty on March 2, 1531. Agrippa's troubles put him out of favor and reduced him to poverty. In 1530 he moved to Malines, where in 1531 he was imprisoned for debt.

Shortly after his release in early 1532, Agrippa traveled to Cologne to visit the Archbishop elector, Hermann von Wied, with whom he had begun correspondence in early 1531. At that time, in fact, the first book of his much-revised *DOP* had appeared in several editions at Cologne, Antwerp, and Paris, with a dedicatory epistle to von Wied.

Agrippa now began publishing *DOP*. Typically, in 1532 the Cologne Inquisitor, Konrad Köllin of Ulm, preached against the book as heretical. Agrippa of course responded with venom, in three works: an address defending himself and attacking the Cologne Faculty of Theology, aligning himself with Erasmus and Reuchlin;[70] a book on the Cologne Dominicans' heresies, not extant;[71] and finally a preface to the writings of

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[69] *Apologia adversus calumnias propter Decalamationem de Vanitate scientiarum, & excellentia verbi Dei, sibi per aliquos Lovanienses Theologistas intentatas. Quaerela super calumnia, ob eandem Declamationem per aliquos sceleratissimos sycophantas, apud Caesaream Maiest. Nefarie ac proditorie illata*, s.l., 1533.

[70] Published in Strasbourg, in 1535, in Latin and German: *Epistola apologetica ad clarissimam urbis Agrippinae Romanorum Coloniae Senatum, contra insaniam Conradi Cölin de Ulma Ordinis praedicatorii monachum Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheym*; and *Ein sendtbrieff an Burgermeister unnd Raht der stat Cöln, wieder die Sophisten, des strengen Ritters. . .Henrici Cornelii Agrippae, newlich verdeütschet*, trans. Theodorus or Dietrich Faber.

[71] *Adversus lamiarum inquisitores*, mentioned by Sisto da Siena in *Bibliotheca sancta . . . libri VIII* (1566), bk. 5, adnot. 73, 348c. Zambelli theorizes that this was mentioned by Agrippa (*Epistolae*, 7, 26 (11 January, 1533), 1042): "Cornelio Agrippa, Sisto da Siena

Godoschalcus Moncordius, a Cistercian monk about whom nothing is known except that he met Agrippa in Bonn; Agrippa apparently lambasted the Dominicans, but the work was not published and the preface is lost.

In late 1532 or 1533, Agrippa moved to Bonn. He petitioned Margaret of Hungary, now governor of the Low Countries, for payment of his overdue salary, and continued relations with the publisher Johannes Soter in Cologne.[72] In 1533 his commentary on the "Ars brevis" of Ramon Lull was published,[73] as was at long last the complete *DOP*. In 1535 Soter also published an edition of Agrippa's collected orations, but it is unclear whether Agrippa was involved with this.

Suddenly in 1533, Agrippa vanishes. No correspondence survives, and his final years are unknown. According to his student Johann Weyer (1515-88), Agrippa took a wife, but repudiated her in 1535. He traveled to Lyon, was briefly imprisoned by Francis I, and died in Grenoble.[74]

After his death, stories of Agrippa's traffic with demons circulated, leading to his incorporation into the Faust legends and his reputation for black magic. In one story, an anonymous boarder or student of Agrippa's comes to a bad end. As Martín Del Rio tells it:

> This happened to Cornelius Agrippa at Louvain. He had a boarder, who was too curious, and Agrippa having once gone somewhere, had given the keys of his museum to the wife whom he afterwards divorced, forbidding her to allow any one to enter. That thoughtless youth did not omit, in season and out of season, to entreat the woman to give him the means of entering, until he gained his prayer. Having entered the museum, he fell

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e gli insquisitori," *Memorie Dominicane* 89 (1972), 69-103; see also Van der Poel, 45-46.

[72] Van der Poel, 44. See also W. Schmitz, "Das humanistische Verlagsprogramm Johannes Soters," in Mehl, *Humanismus in Köln*, 77-111.

[73] *Commentaria in Artem brevem Raimundi Lulli; Tabula abbreviata commentariorum arts inventivae*, in *Opera*, 2, 319-451; the *tabula abbreviata* is lacking in *Opera*, but included in the later printing [*Opera, In Duos Tomos concinne Digesta. . .* (Lyons: Beringos Fratres, n.d.)], which is more complete than the earlier version from which the Olms facsimile was made; Albert Caillet (*Manuel bibliographique des sciences psychiques ou occultes,* 3 vols. (Paris: Lucien Dorbon, 1912), vol. 1, entry 82, p. 12) notes that this edition has been called "contrefaite et mutilée," and after giving a contents list remarks, "Puissent toutes les Editions être ainsi mutilées!" The edition is in round letters, rather than the italics thought by Prost to be "fort belle" (Prost 2.519). Neither edition *Opera* can be as early as one title page attests—1531—given that both editions contain the spurious *Liber quartus de occulta philosophia* [Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy], written around 1554.

[74] *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563), cap. 2,5; edition cited, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, De praestigiis daemonum*, ed. George Mora and Benjamin Kohl, trans. John Shea (Binghamton, NY and Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991/98), 113-14.

> upon a book of conjurations—read it. Hark! there is knocking at the door; he is disturbed; but he goes on with his reading; some one knocks again; and the unmannerly youth answering nothing to this, a demon enters, asks why is he called? What is it commanded him to do? Fear stifles the youth's voice, the demon his mouth, and so he pays the price of his unholy curiosity. In the meantime the chief magician returns home, sees the devils dancing over him, uses the accustomed arts, they come when called, explain how the thing happened; he orders the homicide spirit to enter the corpse, and to walk now and then in the market-place (where other students were accustomed frequently to meet), at length to quit the body. He walks three or four times, then falls; the demon that had stirred the dead limbs taking flight. It was long thought that this youth had been seized with sudden death, but signs of suffocation first begot suspicion, afterwards time divulged all.[75]

Another typical story is that of Agrippa's black dog, which resurfaced as Faust's *schwarze Püdel*.[76] M. Thevet recounts this story in purple prose:

> At last, having betaken himself to Lyons, very wretched, and deprived of his faculties [!], he tried all the means that he could to live, waving, as dexterously as he could, the end of his stick, and yet gained so little, that he died in a miserable inn, disgraced and abhorred before all the world, which detested him as an accursed and execrable magician, because he always carried about with him as his companion a devil in the figure of a dog, from whose neck, when he felt death approaching, he removed the collar, figured all over with magic characters, and afterwards, being in a half-mad state, he drove it from him with these words: "Go, vile beast, by whom I am brought utterly to perdition." And afterwards this dog, which had been so familiar with him, and been his assiduous companion in his travels, was no more seen; because, after the command Agrippa gave him, he began to run towards the Saône, where he leapt in, and never came out thence, for which reason it is judged that he was drowned there.[77]

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[75] Martin Del Rio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*, Lib. ii, Quaest. xxix. Quoted and translated in Morley, 314-15, from the 1657 Cologne edition; I have correlated this with the 1608 Louvain edition and made a few trifling changes. This story is the basis for Robert Southey's "Cornelius Agrippa: A Ballad," in *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey,* 10 vols. (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1838), vol. 6, 82-83; a portion of this doggerel appears as an epigraph to chapter 3 below.

[76] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, part 1, line 1147ff.

[77] M. Thevet, *Portraits et Vies des Hommes Illustres* (Paris, 1584), 2, 543; quoted in Morley, 319. The story first appears in Paolo Giovio, *Elogia doctorum virorum ab avorum memoria publicatis ingenii monumentis illustrium* (Basel, 1577), 236-37; see also Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1580), 20 & 219-21.

Weyer's refutation of this story tells more about Agrippa's personality and habits than any other single source:

> I will no longer allow a statement that I have read in several different writers to be wrapped in silence—namely, that the Devil, in the form of a dog, had been a companion to Agrippa right up until his last breath, and that he then vanished somehow or other. It never ceases to amaze me that men of such repute sometimes speak, think, and write so foolishly on the basis of an idle rumor that had circulated. The dog was black, of moderate stature, and was named Monsieur in French. . . and if anyone knew him well, I did, since I often walked him on a rope leash when I was studying under Agrippa. . . . I think that this false rumor arose partly because Agrippa was too childishly fond of this dog (as some people are), very often kissing him, and sometimes putting him by his side at the table, just as he allowed him in bed with him under the covers at night, after he had repudiated his [third] wife. . . . Also, the rumor arose partly because my master, though he constantly hid himself among his papers . . . and scarcely came out once in eight days, was nevertheless usually informed about what was going on in different countries. Some persons of little prudence used to attribute this fact, in my presence, to the dog—as being a demon; but in truth Agrippa received letters daily from every region, written by eminent scholars.[78]

Works

Agrippa wrote a great many treatises, orations, declamations, and letters. It is unnecessary to survey all of these here, but a few points need to be summarized: first, *De vanitate*, arguably Agrippa's most influential work; next, a summary of *DOP* itself, and a brief account of the Juvenile Draft; and finally, the famous retraction of 1526.

De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque artium, atque excellentia verbi Dei declamatio (1526)

De vanitate, undoubtedly Agrippa's best-known work, consists essentially of a scathing satirical assault on all forms of human knowledge, at times gracefully written, at others heavy-handed and inelegant. The book was

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[78] Weyer, *De praestigiis*, 113. Nauert (ch. 12: "Fact and Fantasy: Agrippa's Position in Intellectual History," 322-34) uncovers many hidden ways in which Agrippa, as both a thinker and a figure of legend, had a significant impact on later literature and thought.

destined to be extremely influential on the thought of the later sixteenth century, notably on Montaigne and (negatively) Descartes; rather later, it was to cause a minor crisis in the thought of the young Goethe.[79]

De vanitate has been compared to Nicholas of Cusa's *On Learned Ignorance*, works in praise of the ass such as that of Apuleius, and especially Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. Indeed, Erasmus himself commented positively on *De vanitate*, although one has the impression that he felt it to be far too vicious, and that he disapproved of Agrippa's war with the monks:

> I liked the emotional force [δείνωσις] of your language and the richness of your material, and I do not understand why the monks are so offended. As you censure the bad ones, so you praise the good ones, but they only like to be praised. What I advised you before, I would advise you now, that if you conveniently can, you extricate yourself from this contention. . . . Of this, before everything, take heed that you do not mix me up with the matter: I am burdened with more than enough ill-will, and this would trouble me, while doing you more harm than good.[80]

The structure of *De vanitate* is simple enough, beginning with a bitingly satirical letter to the reader listing everyone to be criticized in the book and what they will think of its author:

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[79] On Montaigne and Agrippa, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 256n.42; also Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*(Berlin, 1922), 1:192-4.

Goethe, speaking of Hofrath Huisgen in *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* 1:4, remarks, "Eins seiner Lieblingsbücher war *Agrippa de vanitate scientiarum*, das er mir besonders empfahl, und mein junges Gehirn dadurch eine Zeit lang in ziemliche Verwirrung setzte [One of his favorite books was Agrippa's *De vanitate scientiarum*, which he especially commended to me, and so set my young brains in a considerable whirl for a long time]" (quoted in Nauert, 327n.16); see variant in Handschrift 23b.

On Descartes and *De vanitate*, see Popkin, *Scepticism*, 173.

[80] *Epistolae* 7, 40 (21 April, 1533), 1066: "Placuit δείνωσις et copia, nec videuo, quur tantopere indignentur monachi. Ut vituperas malos, ita laudas bonos. Sed illi tantum amant laudari. Quod tum tibi suasi, rursus suadeo, et, si commode possis, extrices te ab ista contentione. . . . Illud imprimis cave, ne me isti negotio admisceas. Plus satis oneror invidia. Eares et me gravabit, et tibi magis obsfuerit, quam profuerit." This letter also appears in *Erasmi Epistolae*, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), no. 2796 (10:203). All the letters between Agrippa and Erasmus may be found in Allen, vol. 9, nos. 2544, 2589, 2626; and vol. 10, nos. 2692, 2737, 2739, 2748, 2790, 2796.

> The wandering Cosmographers will banish me beyond Muscovy and the frozen Sea. . . . The Almighty Bishops will reserve my sins for Everlasting fire. The Lecherous Whores will threaten to give me the French Pox.[81]

Agrippa then moves on to 102 chapters (103 including the conclusion), each attacking a particular art. For each, he gives a brief account of the content and history of the art, then goes on to attack its professors.

The mode of critique varies with the subject. In some cases, as with the art of Goetia or Necromancy,[82] Agrippa simply points out various classical and scriptural authorities for the condemnation of these "rites of detestable curiosity" (*nefariae curiositatis ritibus*) and lists a number of famous necromancers and books of goetic magic.[83]

More often, he engages in satire reminiscent of (if generally less elegant than) Erasmus's *Encomium moriae*, as in his brutal assault on monks:

> . . .at this day in many countries they alone usurp the holy name of Religion, and do boast that they are the companions of Christ, and fellow mates of the Apostles: whose life oftentimes is most wicked full of covetousness, of luxuriousness, of gluttony, ambition, of indiscreetness, of knavery, and stored with all kinds of mischief, but always unpunished for the pretense of Religion.[84]

Such attacks are often augmented by the juxtaposition of chapters, as when the chapter on monks is followed by that "On the whorish Art":

> very many houses of Nuns and Beguines be as it were private stews of harlots, which we know also that Monks and religious persons (lest their chastity should be defamed) have oftentimes maintained in monasteries under a Monk's hood and man's apparel.[85]

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[81] *De vanitate*, Ad lectorem, 6-8/7-8: ". . .ultra Sauromatas & glacialem relegabunt vagi Cosmimetrae. . . .Peccata reservabunt aeternis ignibus plenipotentes Pontifices. Gallicam scabiem comminabuntur salaces meretriculae."

[82] *De vanitate* 45, 94-96/130-133; *goetia* is a general term for magic dealing with evil spirits or the spirits of the dead, from the Greek γοητεία [Liddell and Scott give "witchcraft," but see the discussion of definitions above].

[83] Cf. Weyer, *De praestigiis* 2:5, "Concerning Certain Books of Magic."

[84] *De vanitate* 62, 150-1/198: ". . .sacrum religionis nomen sibi soli usurpant, ac se Christi sodales, Apostolorumque contubernales iactant: quorum vita saepe scelestissima, est avaritia, libidine, gula, ambitione, temeritate, petulantia, & omni scelere referta, sed religionis praetextu semper inulta."

[85] *De vanitate* 63, 153/201: ". . .quin & plurimae monialium & vestalium ac beguinarum domus, privatae quaedam meretricularum fornices sunt, quae etiam monachos & religiosos (ne diffametur eorum castitas) nonnunquam sub monachali cuculla, ac virili veste in monasteriis aluisse scimus.

Agrippa's use of humorous anecdotes is worth noting, especially because it was one such story which occasioned a significant part of his later troubles with the Louvain faculty. In his chapters on painting and engraving (caps. 24 & 25), Agrippa jokes:

> . . . I learned in time past in Italy, that there was in Pictures and Images an authority greatly to be esteemed: for whereas there was an obstinate strife between the Augustine Friars and the vulgar Canons before the Pope, concerning the habit or apparel of St. Augustine, that is to say, whether he did wear a black weed [habit] upon a white Coat, or a white weed upon a black Coat. And finding nothing in the Scriptures which made to the ending of this strife, the Roman Judges thought good to prefer the whole matter to Painters, and Image Makers, and that which they could avouch out of Ancient Pictures and Images should be held for a Definitive sentence. I being grounded upon this example, when sometime with exceeding great diligence I searched for the Original of the Friars' cowl, and could find nothing for that matter in the Scriptures, at length, I went me to the Painters. . . . and again diligently examining every thing from the beginning, immediately in the forepart of the History the Devil was painted with a Cowl, to wit, he which went to tempt Christ in the Desert. I rejoiced exceedingly that I had found that in the picture which until that time I could not see in writing: that is to say, that the Devil was the first author of the Cowl, of whom afterward, I suppose, that other Monks and Friars took up the fashion under diverse colors, or perhaps have retained it as a thing left to them by inheritance.[86]

When he discusses arts for which he has some respect, however, the attacks become more specifically directed at errors, though he never passes up an opportunity to snipe at monks or scholastic theologians. Agrippa's attack on scriptural interpretation, for example, merely warns that:

> all the interpreting Divines, forasmuch as they are men, they also suffer human things, in one place they err, in another they write contraries and repugnances, oftentimes they disagree from themselves, in many things, they go besides the mark, and every man seeth not all things.[87]

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[86] *De vanitate* 25, 59-60/82. I have given the quote in full, as the incident is referred to with some regularity in the literature on Agrippa and *De vanitate*, but the entirety of the text is rarely if ever given. This was one of the 18 denounced passages listed by the Louvain Faculty.

[87] *De vanitate* 98, 289/361: "verum omnes hi interpretativi Theologi, homines cum sint, humana quoque patiuntur, alicubi errant, alicubi contraria aut pugnantia scribunt, nonnunquam a seipsis dissentiunt, in multis hallucinantur, nec omnes omnia vident."

The argument of *De vanitate* is not that all knowledge is worthless, as has sometimes been maintained, but rather that no knowledge can have value unless it is guided by faith. In interpretation, for example,

> it is needful to have a higher spirit to judge and discern, which is not given us by men, nor by flesh and blood, but is given from above by the father of light, for none without his light can truly speak any godly thing. And this light is God's word, by which all things are made, giving light to every man that cometh into this world, and giving them power to be made the sons of God.[88]

The work ends with a lengthy discussion of the word of God and an encomium on the virtues of the ass (caps.100 and 102).

De vanitate is part of the genre of skeptical and satirical reformist works of the period, of which the most famous is Erasmus's *Encomium moriae*. Agrippa's main contribution here is his early use of Pyrrhonist skepticism and his comprehensive survey of all human knowledge.[89]

De occulta philosophia libri tres (1510/1531/33)

DOP is divided into three books, explicitly connected with the Neoplatonic worlds (natural, celestial, divine). As the remainder of the present work reads *DOP* closely, I give only a brief summary here.

Each book of *DOP* begins with dedicatory epistles. The work opens with Agrippa's letter to Trithemius, which prefaced the juvenile draft of 1510, to which is appended Trithemius's response. This is followed by a letter to Hermann von Wied, Archbishop Elector of Cologne, written for the 1531 printing of Book I. Books II and III each begin with letters to Hermann von Wied, written for the final 1533 printing of the entire *DOP*. These epistles are not of much interest for the present analysis of *DOP*, though we shall return to parts of them here and there, but one passage from the third letter to von Wied is worth quoting at length:

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[88] *De vanitate* 98, 289-90/362: "Hic tamen altiore opus est spiritu, qui diiudicet atque discernat, qui videlicet non ex hominibus, nec ex carne et sanguine, sed desuper datus sit a patre luminum: de Deo enim sine eius lumine nemo rite quicquam effari potest, lumen autem illud est verbum Dei, per quod omnia facta sunt, illuminans omnem venientem in hunc mundum, dans illis potestatem filios Dei ficri, quotquot receperunt, et crediderunt ei."

[89] Popkin, *Scepticism*, 23-26.

> When we, by the remembrance of [divine science's] majesty being always busied in divine studies, do every moment contemplate divine things, by a sage and diligent inquisition, and by all the degrees of the creatures ascending even to the Archetype himself, we do draw from him the infallible virtue of all things; which those that neglect, trusting only to natural and worldly things, are wont often to be confounded by diverse errors and fallacies, and very oft to be deceived by evil spirits. But the understanding of divine things purgeth the mind from errors, and rendereth it divine, giveth infallible power to our works, and driveth far the deceits and obstacles of all evil spirits, and together subjects them to our command.[90]

This importantly reverses the usual criticism of Agrippa as magician, that he strays beyond licit natural magic into dangerous demonic magic.[91] The argument here is precisely the contrary: without ceremonial, demonic magic, natural (and presumably celestial) magic tends to slip into evil and darkness. As the present analysis will show, this argument is that of *DOP* in nuce, and is subtly consistent with *De vanitate*.

Turning to the body of the text, Book I, on Natural Magic, opens with a brief synopsis of the work (ch. 1), followed by a definition of magic and its parts (ch. 2). Next we turn to the elements (chs. 3-8) and the occult virtues which depend upon them (chs. 9-13). Next comes a general theory of these virtues and their discovery (chs. 14-22), and astrological ascriptions of virtues and elements (chs. 23-34), interleaved with a discussion of seals and characters (ch. 33). Next come mixtures of elements and virtues, and how they are attracted and drawn (chs. 35-39), followed by specific discussions of magical techniques for this purpose (chs. 40-50). This general discussion is followed by specific examples in chapter 51, from which we move to forms of divination (chs. 52-60). Divination having led to issues of the mind and spirit, we are led to a general discussion of the mind (ch. 61) and a lengthy analysis of the passions (chs. 62-66). Next

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[90] *DOP* I: e.d., 399/435: "Hoc autem solum et maxime praestat nobis divinae scientiae notio, quando eius maiestatis recordatione divinis semper studiis occupati, res divinas per omnia horarum momenta sagaci ac pervigili inquisitione contemplamur et, per singulos creatorum gradus ad ipsum usque Archetypum ascendendtes, ab illo rerum omnium inerrabilem haurimus virtutem; quam qui negligunt, naturalibus et mundanis tantummodo confidentes, hi solent variis saepe erroribus ac fallentiis confundi et a malis daemonibus saepissime falli. Divinorum autem intelligentia purgat mentem erroribus redditque divinam, virtutem operibus nostris infallibilem praestat et malorum omnium daemonum fraudes et obstacula longe propellit illosque simul imperio nostro subiicit, etiam bonos angelos et universas mundi virtutes in nostrum ministerium cogit. . . ."

[91] See e.g. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 132-33 & 141; she wavers between Agrippa "invested with the noble robes of Renaissance magic" and as "an irresponsible magician."

comes examination of how the mind can have power over other minds and beings (chs. 67-68), with speech, names, and verses being cited as specific examples (chs. 69-72). Finally this discussion of the power of language leads to examination of the power of writing (chs. 73-74).

Book II, on Mathematical Magic, opens with a vague explanation of the necessity of mathematics (ch.1), and continues with a discussion of numbers. Each number from one to twelve receives a special discussion and a shorthand table (chs. 4-14), followed by a chapter (15) on numbers larger than twelve. Chapters 16-21 discuss notations for numbers, from gestures to letters of alphabets, as well as the pagan gods and elements with which numbers are associated; chapter 22 discusses a set of magic squares from which are derived special characters associated with demonic beings. We move on to harmony and proportion, in the related senses of geometry, music, and human proportions (chs. 23-28), followed by a discussion of the planets and other objects of the heavens (29-34). We are told that every celestial object can be associated with an image, seal, or character, and these images are described in a series of short chapters devoted to each celestial object (35-47). Images and characters not specifically connected to objects but rather to ideas or forces, take up the next two chapters (48-9), and chapter 50 contains the second major applied discussion, "the practice of some images." From these images, *DOP* moves on to abstract written characters (51-2), divination by astrology and lottery (53-4), and an analysis of the World-Soul and how it relates to the celestial powers (55-7). The highest of the celestial powers, which participate in the divine, are named and described (58-9), and the book concludes with an explanation of how it is that the human mind is capable of controlling and directing these celestial agencies.

Book III, on Ceremonial Magic, begins with an explanation of religion's importance to magic, including secrecy, purity, and a set of distinctions between religion, superstition, theology, and so forth (chs. 1-6). Next comes a general discussion of the nature of God (chs. 7-9), followed by divine names (chs. 10-14). The argument moves down the celestial hierarchy to intelligences, spirits, demons, and angels, and discusses classification and characteristics (chs. 15-22). Next we come to the language of angels (ch. 23), which leads naturally to a number of methods of deriving or discovering angelic and demonic names (chs. 24-28), followed by the characters and seals of the angels and demons (chs. 29-31). Specific techniques of summoning and exorcizing are discussed in chapters 32 and 33, followed by the lower orders of demonic beings

(chs. 34-35). Next comes man, and his spiritual characteristics and powers (chs. 36-40), which leads to the nature of death and a discussion of necromancy (chs. 41-42). We return to human powers, now with regard to the soul in particular (chs. 43-44), which leads to a number of forms of ecstatic prophecy and divination (chs. 45-52). The next several chapters deal with ritual purity and preparations for magical ceremonies (chs. 54-64), and then *DOP* ends quite abruptly with a very important chapter entitled simply, "The conclusion of the whole work" (ch. 65).

The Juvenile Draft

The juvenile draft of 1510 is miraculously preserved in its original form, as the extant copy appears to be the presentation copy sent to Trithemius. Vittoria Perrone Compagni has constructed a comparative table of contents of this manuscript against the final draft; here only a few brief notes need be made.[92]

The juvenile draft is considerably shorter, and in some respects structured differently from the final version. Several chapters shift from one book to another, while others are broken across two or more final chapters. Two of Agrippa's most important sources, Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* and Francesco Zorzi's *De harmonia mundi*, had not been written in 1510, and their incorporation dramatically expands the text, particularly in its treatment of Kabbalah.

In the course of the present work, it will periodically be important that certain passages and chapters do or do not appear in the juvenile draft, and this is mentioned where appropriate. Nonetheless, there is more consistency than difference between the two drafts, just as the bulk of Agrippa's writings represent a consistent development of a core philosophy.[93]

The Retraction

The classic argument against Agrippa's consistency derives from chapter 48 of *De vanitate*, devoted to illusions (*praestigiae*), where Agrippa gives this famous retraction of *DOP*:

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[92] Perrone Compagni, 54-59.

[93] References to the Juvenile Draft follow Perrone Compagni's format, where W refers to the draft. Thus "passage not in W" or "chapter not in W" indicates differences between the final 1533 draft and the Juvenile Draft. Some chapters appears in the 1533 draft but not in the table of contents of the 1531 Book I, which will be mentioned in the notes.

> I also as a young man wrote on magical matters three books in a sufficiently large volume, which I have entitled Of Hidden Philosophy, in which books whatsoever was then done amiss through curious youth, now being more advised I will that it be recanted with this retraction, for I have in times past consumed very much time and substance in these vanities. At the length I got this profit thereby, that I know by what means I should discourage and dissuade others from this destruction. For all they that presume to divine and prophecy not in the truth, not in the virtue of God, but in the illusion of devils, according to the operation of wicked spirits, and exercising deceits of idolatry, and showing illusions and vain visions, the which suddenly ceasing, they avaunt that they can work miracles, by Magical vanities, exorcisms, enchantments, drinks of love, Agogimes, and other devilish works, all these with Iamnes and Mambres and Simon Magus shall be condemned to the pains of everlasting fire.[94]

This retraction has occasioned many theories and explanations, because it seems clear that Agrippa continued to work on the final version of *DOP* during the 1520's, and it is certain that he was revising furiously in the period immediately preceding the final publication of the work in 1533.

Auguste Prost argued that Agrippa ceased believing in magic, as evidenced by the retraction, and that in later life "tout cela est pour Agrippa exercice et jeu d'esprit. C'est peut-être bien plutôt ce qu'on appellerait aujourd'hui oeuvre de charlatanisme."[95]

Lynn Thorndike's stated that Agrippa "was not untrue to himself in printing . . . this work [*DOP*] begun in his youth."[96] It is unclear whether he means that *De vanitate* was a product of Agrippa's later thought or a passing mood; Thorndike seems so unsure that it is easy to misread him as saying that *DOP* was *completed* in Agrippa's youth.

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[94] *De vanitate* 48, 104-5/141-2: "Verum de magicis scripsi ego iuvenis adhuc libros tres, amplo satis volumine, quos de Occulta philosophia nucupavi: in quibus quidquid tunc per curiosam adolescentiam erratum est, nunc cautior hac palinodia recantatum volo: permultum enim temporis et rerum in his vanitatibus olim contrivi. Tandem hoc profeci, quod sciam, quem iis rationibus oporteat alios ab hac pernicie dehortari. Quicunque enim non in vertate, nec in virtute Dei, sed in elusione daemonum, secundum operationem malorum spirituum, divinare et prophetare praesumunt, et per vanitates magicas, exorcismos, incantationes, amatoria, agogima, et caetera opera daemoniaca, et idolatriae fraudes exercentes, praestigia et phantasmata ostentantes, mox cessantia miracula sese operari iactant, omnes hi cum Iamne et Mambre, et Simone mago aeternis ignibus cruciandi destinabuntur."

[95] Prost, 2:358.

[96] *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1941), 5:122-23.

Joseph Leon Blau, discussing Agrippa in the context of Christian Kabbalah, suggested that "for a brief period in his life the skeptic was uppermost in him; both before and after this period he was the credulous philosopher of magic."[97]

Frances Yates, despite her mistaken impression (probably from Thorndike) that Agrippa "had completed the work by 1510, but did not publish it until 1533, that is several years after," proposed a new theory which became quite influential. She argued that the retraction was:

> a safety-device of a kind frequently employed by magicians and astrologers for whom it was useful, in case of theological disapproval, to be able to point to statements made by themselves 'against' their subjects, by which, however, they usually mean that they are only against bad uses of such knowledge, not their own good uses.[98]

One can only assume that Yates had not read *De vanitate*, which is so viciously anti-clerical as to make any notion of a "safety-device" bizarre in the extreme. This is particularly unfortunate because, in a review of the better-informed Charles Nauert's *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, she used her theory as a springboard for critique.[99]

The most convincing theory to date was proposed by Marc Van der Poel. He notes that in *DOP*'s letter to the reader, Agrippa remarks with some asperity that his early work has circulated in imperfect manuscripts, and argues that a complete version of the revised work will be preferable. In addition, Van der Poel points to the remark in *De vanitate* that "all they that presume to divine and prophecy not in the truth, not in the virtue of God. . .they avaunt that they can work miracles, by Magical vanities. . ." are consigned to the fires of hell. Van der Poel interprets this as leaving room for a legitimate *and non-demonic* magic, as in Marsilio Ficino or Pico, as opposed to the wicked vanity condemned in *De vanitate*.[100]

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[97] Joseph Leon Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944; reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1965), 85.

[98] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 131.

[99] Frances Yates, "The Magic Christian" (review of Nauert), *New York Review of Books*, March 3, 1966, 18-20.

[100] Van der Poel, 51-55. See Nauert (chapter 8, "The Odyssey of Agrippa's Mind," 194-222) for an excellent survey of the theories and complexities regarding the retraction, and a discussion of the whole problem of consistency and coherence in Agrippa's thought. Nauert's view, to which we shall periodically return, is essentially that *De vanitate* and *DOP* are not in fundamental disagreement; at the same time, he is cautious about proposing a reconciliation.

This latter argument had already been partly made by Paola Zambelli and M.H. Keefer,[101] as Van der Poel notes, and is crucial to interpretation not only of the retraction but of *De vanitate* and *DOP* as coherent parts of Agrippa's work. But in acknowledging that the retraction is not what it appears to be, we can go further toward understanding Agrippa's distinctions. As we shall see in chapters three and four below, Agrippa's retraction leaves room for multiple forms of *demonic* magic, some licit, some illicit. In particular, the retraction condemns those who "avaunt that they can work miracles, by Magical vanities," rather than condemning the magical practices themselves, leaving room for those who "divine and prophecy" within the truth and virtue of God.

The retraction is in some ways an excellent example of the subtlety of Agrippa's writing at its best. *De vanitate* argues conclusions which seem directly contradictory to *DOP*, and this apparent disjuncture in Agrippa's thought has occasioned numerous interpretations. The critical point here is that Agrippa's statements in *De vanitate* cannot always be taken at their simplest level; indeed, *De vanitate* and *DOP* can in places be read as flip sides of the same coin, one pessimistic and the other optimistic.

I will argue that Agrippa is often quite careful about his verbiage. In *DOP*, as a rule, Agrippa uses technical terminology consistently, rarely using two different terms simply for stylistic variety.[102] I suggest, in fact, that careful terminological consideration of *DOP* reveals arguments in no way inconsistent with *De vanitate*. When Agrippa uses different terms apparently synonymously, I begin with the assumption that the synonymy is illusory, one of Agrippa's many tricks to deceive the incautious reader.

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[101] Paola Zambelli, "Umanesimo magico-astrologico e raggruppamenti segreti nei platonici della preriforma," in Eugenio Garin et al., *Umanesimo e esoterismo* (Padua, 1960), 146n.10; M.H. Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma: Hermetic 'Rebirth' and the Ambivalences of 'De vanitate' and 'De occulta philosophia'," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988), 645n.78.

[102] With non-technical vocabulary, on the other hand, Agrippa is extremely variable. The great difficulty is thus to discern which terms are part of a technical vocabulary and which are not.

CHAPTER TWO

LOGOS AND NATURE

> Natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate; I desire, therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my predilection for that science. When I was thirteen years of age . . . . I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate and the wonderful facts which he relates soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind, and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my book and said, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash."
>
> —Victor Frankenstein

The body of *De occulta philosophia* opens with a statement of purpose. I quote this in its entirety, but its meaning will require the next three chapters of analysis to become clear.

> Seeing there is a threefold world, elementary, celestial, and intellectual, and every inferior is governed by its superior, and receiveth the influence of the virtues thereof, so that the very original, and chief Worker of all doth by angels, the heavens, stars, elements, animals, plants, metals, and stones convey from himself the virtues of his omnipotency upon us, for whose service he made, and created all these things: wise men conceive it no way irrational that it should be possible for us to ascend by the same degrees through each world, to the same very original world itself, the Maker of all things, and First Cause, from whence all things are, and proceed; and also to enjoy not only these virtues, which are already in the more excellent kind of things, but also besides these, to draw new virtues from above.[1]

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[1] *DOP* I:1, 85/3, passage not in W (Juvenile Draft).

Without understanding this "threefold world" and the ways in which "every inferior is governed by its superior," we cannot make sense of this introductory remark. The onus of these analytical chapters will be to clarify the purpose of the occult philosophy, so boldly stated here. For the present, then, let us turn to *DOP* I:2, "What magic is, what are the parts thereof, and how the professors thereof must be qualified."[2] The chapter is repeated almost verbatim from the Juvenile Draft I:2, and begins with the following famous definition:

> Magic is a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most secret things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature, and it doth instruct us concerning the differing, and agreement of things amongst themselves, whence it produceth its wonderful effects, by uniting the virtues of things through the application of them one to the other, and to their inferior suitable subjects, joining and knitting them together thoroughly by the powers, and virtues of the superior bodies.[3]

Although this is strictly speaking the definition of magic in general, it has often been read (with justification) as a definition of *natural* magic in particular.[4] The present chapter therefore explicates this single definition through an analysis of *DOP*'s natural magic.

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[2] *DOP* I:2, 86/5, Quid sit magia, quae eius partes et qualem oporteat esse magiae professorem.

[3] *DOP* I:2, 86/5: "Magica facultas, potestatis plurimae compos, altissimis plena mysteriis, profundissimam rerum secretissimarum contemplationem, naturam, potentiam, qualitatem, substantiam et virtutem totiusque naturae cognitionem complectitur et quomodo res inter se differunt et quomodo conveniunt nos instruit, hinc mirabiles effectus suos producens, uniendo virtutes rerum per applicationem earum ad invicem et ad sua passa congruentia, inferiora superiorum dotibus ac virtutibus passim copulans atque maritans: . . ."

[4] See, for instance, Giambattista Della Porta, *Magiae naturalis, sive de miraculis rerum naturalium libri IIII* (Antwerp, 1558), and *Magiae naturalis libri viginti* (Frankfurt, 1589); there is a translation available: *Natural Magick* (London: printed for T. Young and S. Speed, 1658; reprint, New York: Basic Books, 1957), on page 2 of which we read that natural magic "is nothing else but the survey of the whole course of Nature." See also William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 210-217 *et passim*.

The Natural Magic Problem

Natural magic is and must remain a fundamental problem for historians of early modern science and intellectual history. It is clear that natural magic in the sixteenth century had something to do with the development of new approaches to and theories of nature and experiment, but beyond this now obvious point scholars disagree continually.

Much of the difficulty is that definitions of natural magic have minimal consistency from thinker to thinker. Although a few somewhat ill-informed scholars have thought otherwise, thinkers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries generally considered this form of magic licit, if occasionally dangerous.[5] Thus the definitional problem is that the category "natural magic" contains, for most orthodox thinkers, all the acceptable forms of magic and nothing else. In essence, "natural magic" often equates to "acceptable magic."

This stance led to a kind of backward reasoning by more radical thinkers on both sides. For those most antagonistic to magic in all its forms, the constant push is to contract the category—to argue that some practice is not natural, and thus remove it simultaneously from "natural magic" and from legality.[6] On the opposite end of the spectrum, as we shall see, many magical thinkers argue the naturalness of (for example) astrology and alchemy, thereby claiming legality through a rhetoric of inclusion. In effect "natural" became a terminological weapon in the long battles among thinkers about nature and its relation to humanity and the divine.

For the historian of science, such rhetorical conflict makes things at once extremely complex and full of interest, not least because it is precisely such debates that led to the re-imagining of nature which was at least important to, if not the crux of, the scientific revolution.

Agrippa's position in all this is peculiar and difficult, leading in part to the general ambivalence toward him among historians of science. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Agrippa does not use "natural" apotropaically, because he considers natural magic only one of several licit forms of magic.

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[5] Orthodox writers of the later sixteenth century largely moved to redefine terms such that *all* forms of magic were proscribed, whether natural or otherwise.

[6] See, for instance, Jean Bodin, *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (Paris: J. de Puys, 1587 [1580]); according to Caillet, the 1587 is the only complete edition: Albert Caillet, *Manuel bibliographique des sciences psychiques ou occultes* (Paris: Lucien Dorbon, 1912), 182. Also Martín Del Rio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (Louvain: G. Rivii, 1599).

Rather than arguing, with Ficino, that astrological talismans are licit because rooted in natural forces, he accepts them on their own merits as mathematical or celestial magic. Indeed, *DOP* goes so far as to argue that the moral validity of natural magic arises not from its naturalness, but from its deeper dependence from the celestial and divine. *DOP*'s reversal of the usual defense of suspected forms of magic also entails its problematic relationship to the history of science, since on the surface seems that the work argues against precisely the separation of nature and divinity foundational for the scientific enterprise.

Of course, any reader familiar with the last few decades of historiography on the scientific revolution will recognize the problem with the preceding argument: it is no longer possible to say glibly that the scientific revolution depended upon—or even necessarily involved—such a separation of nature from the divine. Our understanding of Agrippa's relationship to the scientific revolution is conditioned by our perception of that revolution, a matter of constant concern for many historians.[7]

The following analysis focuses on these problems of definition. The principal distinction in early modern definitions of natural magic was that between natural and demonic magic, the latter closely overlapping with the technical term "superstition." As defined by the Roman Inquisition, "It is superstitious to expect any effect from anything when such an effect cannot be produced by natural causes, by divine institutions, or by the ordination and approval of the Church."[8] Thus superstition can be simply ignorance, as in the case of a belief about the curative properties of some supposedly magical stone, or it can be heretical or diabolical, as in the case of an appeal to a supernatural but not divine agency for assistance.

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[7] The notion of a "scientific revolution" is itself highly debated, not only in its definition but in its very existence. See, for example, David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman, eds. *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); H. Floris Cohen's *The Scientific Revolution: A Historiographical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) is also useful, particularly sections 3.7 (229-36) and 7.2 (494-502). Rather than avoid the term entirely, which would only necessitate finding a substitute, I have chosen to drop the hypostasizing capitalization.

[8] Eamon, 205; quoting Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 49, who in turn is quoting Jean-Baptiste Thiers, *Traité des Superstitions qui regardent les Sacremens* (1679; 5th ed., Paris, 1741), 2:8; cf. Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum*, 2:2.7, part of which reads: "The fourth rule is to take care that what is done bears some natural relation to the effect which is expected; for if it does not, it is judged to be superstitious. On this account unknown characters and suspected names, and the images or charts of necromancers and astronomers, are altogether to be condemned as suspect" (*The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1948), 191).

I begin with two important thinkers representing major types of position. First, Marsilio Ficino (1533-1599), whose definitions were foundational for most later thinkers on the definitions problem. Second, Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), whose rather confused and confusing definitions show an important rhetorical approach to, or rather sidestep of, the problem of natural magic, and certainly influenced his one-time student Agrippa. Having examined these critical definitions and their implications, I turn to Agrippa's natural magic. After a discussion of the occult virtues and power, I return to Agrippa's explicit definitions in both *DOP* and *De vanitate*, and attempt to derive a provisional definition of natural magic.

Marsilio Ficino, On Life

The importance of Marsilio Ficino to the history of early modern magical thought cannot be overstressed; he must surely rank along with Cusanus and Pico as one of the founding thinkers of the Renaissance occult revival. Although Frances Yates stressed primarily his translation of the Hermetica, claiming this as the inaugural moment of the "Hermetic tradition," it is mainly to *De vita libri tres* [Three books on life, 1489] that we must turn for an understanding of Ficino's magical thought.

I have noted above that Ficino's explication of the two kinds of magic had continuing force throughout the early modern period; as we shall see, Trithemius adheres to the categorization while in large measure ignoring its substance. Agrippa, however, breaks down the entire distinction in favor of a more complex and logically consistent series. Let us begin with Ficino's original division and definitions, which I shall analyze in some detail:

> [T]here are two kinds of magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to demons by a specific religious rite, and, relying on their help, often contrive portents. This, however, was thoroughly rejected when the Prince of this World was cast out. But the other kind of magic is practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way. Of this profession there are also two types: the first is inquisitive, the second, necessary. The former does indeed feign

> useless portents for ostentation. . . . Nevertheless the necessary type which joins medicine with astrology must be kept.[9]

As Kristeller puts it, "the expert can conduct certain hidden forces of nature into an object and so produce talismans or effective remedies. This type of magic is a kind of art, and Ficino makes extensive use of it for medical purposes. . . ."[10]

For Ficino, the underlying principle is that of movement and force, which must necessarily have some end. These ends are defined by faculties:

> Nature gave to the thick bodies an appetite and tendency through which they would desire the lower places and gave them in addition gravity and cold as means through which they could descend to the desired place [the center of the world]. It gave to the subtler ones the desire for the higher place and added lightness and warmth as means through which they would reach their desired ends.[11]

Plants and animals are mixtures of elements, and as such have additional faculties. Plants have the faculties of nutrition and generation, animals also that of sensation.[12] Meanwhile the celestial spheres move circularly, because "the Soul of the respective sphere constitutes the invisible center." At the same time this motion must have an end, like other motions, and for Ficino this end is the end of the universe: "The present state of the world represents . . . a transitory process limited at both extremes by the moments of creation and of Last Judgment."[13]

As to the human soul, it too has faculties and movements, often expressed as appetites: "the natural appetite of the human intellect and will is directed toward the infinite true and good only, that is, toward God, as its end."[14] Again,

> The whole attempt of our Soul is to become God. This attempt is no less natural for men than the attempt to fly is for birds. For it is inherent in all

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[9] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), 399; quoted in Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 314.

[10] Kristeller, *Ficino*, 314, referring to Ficino, *Opera*, 288 and 548.

[11] Ficino, *Opera,* 308; quoted in Kristeller, *Ficino*, 186.

[12] Kristeller, *Ficino*, 187.

[13] Kristeller, *Ficino*, 188-89.

[14] Kristeller, *Ficino*, 190.

> men always and everywhere and therefore follows, not a contingent quality of an individual, but the nature of the species itself.[15]

There is thus a parallelism between the Soul and fire, because both tend to rise to the tops of their respective spheres:

> The end of fire is the concavity of the last heaven. Therefore, if there were no obstacle each flame would fly up to that place, and when it reached that concavity, if it had sufficient extension, it would extend itself throughout that whole concavity in order to enjoy entirely what is natural to it. . . . The goal and end of the mind is the true and good itself: God. There it runs by an essential instinct like fire. . . .[16]

This fundamental principle of motion or force is thus divided into two main portions, appetite (tendency, instinct) and means or method. Under natural circumstances, forces are applied to objects because the cause of the force has an appetite to do so, and the object receives the force because there is a means by which it may do so. This essentially Aristotelian conception is expanded greatly to take into account the application of celestial forces upon earthly (and particularly human) objects, and it is this expansion that constitutes the bulk of what Ficino means by "natural magic."

I attach here D. P. Walker's excellent diagram of Ficino's natural magic (figure 1). The first point to notice is that the A and B divisions of the various forces (*vis*) point to a distinction between different sorts of force. The A forces are generally accepted, and do not necessarily have anything to do with magic as such—as Walker puts it, "Uses of these A forces are liable to be considered magical only if planetary influences are combined with them, that is, if they are astrological painting, music, etc."[17] The B forces, on the other hand, are more certainly magical, and may be considered illegitimate or false by various thinkers; Ficino grants the reality of all these forces, but does not universally accept their legality.

The *vis imaginum*, or power of images, refers both to objects like paintings and to things like Ficino's famous talismans, which draw celestial power by astrological affinities (e.g. a gold talisman draws solar influence).

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[15] Ficino, *Opera,* 305; quoted in Kristeller, *Ficino*, 190.
[16] Ficino, *Opera,* 99; quoted in Kristeller, *Ficino*, 191.
[17] D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (London: University of London Press, 1958, reprint, Notre Dame, IN and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 78-9; we shall consider these astrological arts in more detail in the next chapter, as Agrippa considers them *celestial* rather than *natural* magic.

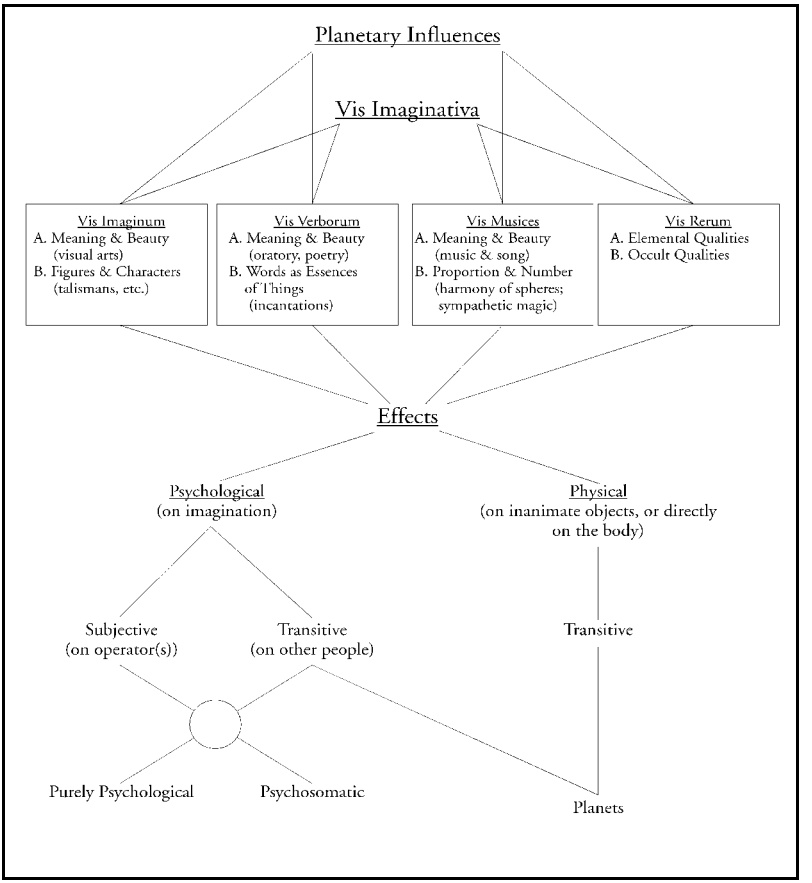

Figure 1: Ficino's system of forces, from D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, 77.

Walker's distinction between A and B types is oddly more applicable to Agrippa than to Ficino—the A type draws power "in proportion to its successful, beautiful representation or expression of its subject," while "the force of a B image lies solely in its astrological affinities."[18] While Ficino does not, so far as I can tell, distinguish sharply between the aesthetic power of an image and its inherent natural power, Agrippa makes this distinction explicit by dealing with images and representations (the A type)

[18] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic,* 80.

in *celestial* magic, while the inherent natural drawing power of objects is dealt with under *natural* magic.

The *vis musices* seems to function exactly the same way as the *vis imaginum*, simply operating through a different physical sense. At the same time, Ficino wishes to distinguish music from other arts because of its higher, nobler power—"music hath charms" indeed![19] With respect to the B type of musical power, which "proposes the production of effects by means of the mathematical or numerical correspondence between the movements, distances or positions of the heavenly bodies and the proportions of consonant intervals in music," Walker notes quite accurately that in Ficino, "The B division of the *vis musices* remained . . . purely theoretical."[20] He recognizes, though, that Agrippa was probably the first to discuss this "purely theoretical" musical magic in relatively concrete terms; he does not, however, remark on the fact that Agrippa placed such magic squarely in the celestial magic of Book II.[21]

The *vis rerum* is the most basic type of natural magic, and in a sense the most indubitably natural. The A division, elemental qualities, includes powers and forces (or virtues) which are inherent in a thing because of its elementary makeup—stones are earthy and therefore heavy, dense, and dry; animals are fiery and thus move rapidly and have warm blood. The B division, occult qualities, includes virtues inherent in a thing because of some celestial influence—gold is Solar, silver Lunar, and so on. These qualities are "occult" because they cannot be determined by the senses alone, but require some application of reason, be it in constructing and analyzing experiments, or in working out the underlying rationale which predicts the celestial affinities of a given thing.[22] This division is crucial to Agrippa's natural magic, and we shall return to it; for the moment, let us simply note that unlike the other three *vires*, all forms of *vis rerum* are considered entirely natural by both Ficino and Agrippa—in fact, the *vis rerum* is the exemplary form of natural magic for both thinkers, although

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[19] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 3-29 deals with musical magic, mainly in Ficino.

[20] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 81.

[21] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 91.

[22] Note that this terminology of "occult qualities" is not necessarily associated only with occult-*ism* or magic; on the contrary, early modern scientists used this term to refer to such invisible but undeniable forces as magnetism and gravity. See Keith Hutchison, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?" *Isis* 73 (267, 1982): 233-53; reprinted in Peter Dear, ed., *The Scientific Enterprise in Early Modern Europe: Readings from Isis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 86-106.

Ficino in order to defend certain practices as licit stretches the analogy to other *vires* considerably farther than Agrippa.

Vis verborum, the power of words, is critical to the performance of many magical acts as well as the construction of talismans and such; at the same time, this power is particularly susceptible to accusations of demonic magic, because words require an intelligent interpreter. "The words or letters, . . . having no one-to-one correspondence with a planet or planetary object, can only be effective through the medium of an intelligent being who understands their significance, namely, a human being, a planetary angel or a deceiving demon." The A and B divisions of this force represent for Ficino a safe and a dangerous solution to the problem—the safe solution (A) "is to confine the effects to the operator or to human patients who also see the talisman, whose signs can then be understood by them and become effective through their intelligences; this excludes effects on inanimate things, on the body, or at a distance."[23] The more dangerous solution (B) is to undermine the assumption that words have "no one-to-one correspondence with a planet or planetary object" by postulating a bridge across the arbitrary nature of the sign. Walker suggests that Ficino strongly supports the A solution, and avoids dealing directly with the B, so that his talismanic magic can to some degree have it both ways.

An important corollary of this division of the *vis verborum* should be noted. There is an implicit assumption that human intelligences in some way differ radically from celestial ones; that is, the A type (poetry or whatever) is here considered perfectly licit because it has a natural object (a human mind) and natural means by which to affect that object (air and the ear or eye). At the same time, Ficino does not usually treat the human mind as a simply material/natural object, but rather places it in the higher spheres. From this apparent inconsistency, I suspect that Ficino's distinction of natural/demonic does not refer to objects or subjects of magical acts, only to his beloved forces and means. On this reading, the only magical acts inherently proscribed are those requiring the manifestation of intelligent *forces*; the difficulty (as we shall see with Trithemius) is then how to distinguish between intelligent forces and others, except in the obvious case of an explicit demonic conjuration.

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[23] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 80.

In his analysis of Ficinian natural magic, Walker comes up with an interesting and problematic definition, which I quote in its entirety:

> In the present scheme, that is, of natural magic, the planets and the operator are not supposed to act directly on anything higher than the spirit, which is the vehicle of the imagination. The effects produced on inanimate things or directly on bodies (unless by the *vis rerum*) are more difficult to explain without assuming a supernatural agent (angelic, demonic or divine) than the purely psychological ones; the same is true of the more odd or abnormal psychosomatic ones, for example, stigmatization or nervous diseases, as opposed to blushing or sleep. There is therefore a strong tendency for the effects of natural magic to be confined to the purely psychological, and the more ordinary psychosomatic ones. The more miraculous effects could be explained as natural, but only by assuming a power in the human spirit which was not generally admitted.[24]

As should be clear from our examination of the four *vires*, the difficulty with this definition is that the *vis rerum*, the ideal-type of natural magic, is set to one side, and the entire focus is on the various effects on humans. In the context of Ficino this is understandable and accurate, since his main interest is in medical magic. At the same time I argue that Ficino's category of "natural magic" is not entirely coherent or consistent. Everything of importance is explained by a loose analogy to *vis rerum*, a privileged but under-theorized example, and furthermore certain logically implied parts of the various subcategories are discarded on rather shaky grounds. As Walker indicates in his footnote to the above passage, "Natural magicians are neither consistent nor disingenuous on this point [i.e. affecting only the human spirit]; they use the A kinds of the *vires imaginum & verborum*, which plainly have intellectual effects."[25]

Johannes Trithemius's "Natural Magic"

Johannes Trithemius (1462- 1516), abbot of Sponheim, was one of the most respected humanists of his age. He reformed his abbey from a decrepit minor cloister to a renowned center of learning, with a famous library of more than two thousand volumes. He was the author of works on monastic discipline and history, hagiography, and a work on John which focused on the Greek text to answer theological questions. In

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[24] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 76-78.
[25] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 78n.1.

addition, he wrote works on witchcraft and demonology, solidly in line with the hard-line orthodoxy of (for example) *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Scholarship on Trithemius's non-magical thought has long had a solid basis, but until the publication of Noel Brann's long-awaited *Trithemius and Magical Theology* it has been exceptionally difficult to penetrate the abbot's magic.[26] By examining in detail the extensive and little-read corpus of Trithemius's works, Brann establishes a continuity and harmony between the abbot's anti-demonic polemics and his occult enthusiasms, particularly his famous interest in ciphers as magical techniques. We shall return to *Steganographia* (ca.1500), Trithemius's most important text on ciphers, in the context of Agrippa's divine magic (page 189 below); for the moment I want to focus on the terminology of "natural magic."

Trithemius divides magic into Ficino's two categories, natural and demonic, which are again essentially cognate to the categories licit and illicit. There are no subdivisions of much importance. For instance, in the autobiographical *Nepiachus* we find that there are four forms of magical illusion (*praestigium*), of which three are demonic and one natural. The first is explicit demonic conjuration, the second is implicit conjuration (using "words, charms, incantations, and objects"), the third is "such deception as those wanderers employ who are known as jugglers," and the fourth and only licit form "pertains to natural magic, under whose auspices marvelous effects (the causes of which those who admire them do not understand) are produced by proficients through the occult application of natural virtue." "Regrettably," Brann notes sardonically, "Trithemius left his readers in the dark as to how they might distinguish, in any particular case, the last-named category of illusion from its demonic look-alikes."[27]

This lack of specificity is endemic to Trithemian natural magic: although his magic involved ideas and practices covering much of the range of early modern magic—Pythagorean numerology, alchemy,

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[26] Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (Albany: SUNY, 1999). On Trithemius outside of the context of magic, see Klaus Arnold, *Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516)* (Würzburg: Kommissionsverlag Fredinand Schöningh, 1971; reprint, 1991); and especially Noel L. Brann, *The Abbott Trithemius (1462-1516): The Renaissance of Monastic Humanism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981).

[27] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 112-13; the references are to Johannes Trithemius, *Nepiachus, ed est, libellus de studiis & scriptis propriis a pueritia repetitia*, in Johann Georg Eccard, *Corpus historicum medii aevi*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Apud Jo. Frid. Gleditschii B. Fil., 1723), cols. 1820-31.

astrology, and Kabbalah, as well as everything in Ficino's natural magic—Trithemius nevertheless defends himself against claims of sorcery by remarking that "many very learned ecclesiastics have approved of, and pursued, natural magic, which not only has never been condemned by the Church but cannot conceivably ever be condemned."[28]

In a sense, what is most peculiar about this definition—or lack thereof—is that Trithemius was actually under attack on a charge of sorcery. After a denunciation by Carolus Bovillus (Charles de Bovelles), Trithemius clearly wished to defend his occult studies and in particular the newly-discovered steganography. Bovillus described the manuscript as filled with:

> unaccustomed names of spirits (should I not rather say demons?) [which] began to terrify me. . . . [These names] are either Arabic, Hebraic, Aramaic, or Greek, yet there are few, indeed, almost no Latin ones; moreover countless characters are used by means of which each conjuration is singularly designated.[29]

Trithemius's defense has three parts, scattered across his late works and especially his long letters. First, he makes the classic move of attaching his own name to that of an orthodox authority, in this case Albertus Magnus. We are told that Albertus was a noted expert in "natural magic, that is, the wisdom of nature, who, by reason of his marvelous knowledge of occult natural virtues, has fallen into suspicion among the vulgar until the present day."[30] From Trithemius's point of view, however, if Albertus "in any way effected the marvels attributed to him, I am satisfied that these were accomplished, not by sorcery, but by hidden powers of nature which had been made accessible to him."[31] In short, Trithemius draws a parallel between Albertus's undeserved notoriety and his own.

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[28] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 115, quoting Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, col. 1831.

[29] Bovillus to Germanus de Ganay (8 March 1509), in Bovillus, *Liber de intellectu . . .* (Paris: In aedibus Francisci de Hallewin, 1510; facsimile, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag [Günther Holzboog], 1970), sig. 172r; quoted in Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 87-88, and see 275n.6 for further bibliographical details on this letter.

[30] Trithemius, *Nepiachus*, col. 1829; quoted in Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 91.

[31] Trithemius, *Catalogus illustrium virorum Germaniae*, in Trithemius, *Opera historica, quotquot hactenus reperiri potuerunt omnia*, 2 parts, ed. Marquard Freher (Frankfurt: Typis Wechelianis apud Claudium Marnium & haeredes Ioannis Aubrij, 1601; facsimile, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1966), I, 141; quoted in Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 92.

Second, Trithemius protests stoutly that he is a faithful Christian, loyal to the Church, and goes on to declaim that he is "a priest and servant of Jesus Christ, one who has never held commerce with the wicked arts nor taken part in the society of, or made a pact with, the demons."[32] Similarly he denounces his accusers for their foolishness, dishonesty, stupidity, and just about any other insults he thinks he can make stick by vehemence and righteous indignation.

Third, and most interesting for our purposes, Trithemius states flatly that "there lies nothing within me beyond the limits of nature—save our Christian faith, which Grace, not nature, has given."[33] Adherence to this faith, and the virtuous behavior which goes with it, is a prerequisite for magical practice, he says, but knowledge is also indispensable:

> . . . without knowledge, through their numbers, degrees, and orders of the middle, end, and origin, the magician cannot, without scandal and impiety, effect his images, nor can the alchemist imitate nature, nor can a man conjure spirits, nor can a prophet of nature predict the future, nor can any curious person grasp the meaning of his experiences.[34]

So long as the magician has the requisite knowledge and is scrupulous about his faith and virtuous intentions, Trithemius is sure that a magical investigation or performance cannot slip into "scandal and impiety," i.e. demonic magic.

What Trithemius does *not* do is explain clearly what is "natural" about his magic. Where he might well have cited Reuchlin's and Pico's defenses of Kabbalah, and extended this to cover the semi-Kabbalistic elements of *Steganographia*, Trithemius simply asserts that he practices only "natural magic." It is perhaps not surprising that he retained his unhappy notoriety. As we shall see, Agrippa was to take up this fundamental problem more coherently. In particular, he argued that natural magic is but one kind of licit magic, and that in fact nearly *all* forms of magic (with the obvious exceptions of explicit diabolism and genuine witchcraft) are

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[32] Trithemius, *Catalogus*, col. 1829; quoted in Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 94.

[33] Trithemius, letter to Count Johannes of Westerburg, Sponheim (10 May, 1503), *Epistolae*, in *De septem secundeis* (Cologne: Apud Ioannem Birkmannum, 1567), 91-92; quoted in Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 94. Note that there is a paraphrase of this and the equally important letter to Joachim of Brandenburg: "De spagirico Artificio Io. Trithemii sententia," in Lazarus Zetzner, *Theatrum chemicum*, 6 vols. (Strassburg: Lazari Zetzneri, 1613-61), 1:425ff; see Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 280n.74.

[34] Trithemius to Westerburg, 85-86; Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 120.

in themselves licit. While Trithemius and Agrippa both sought to salvage the noble reputation of magic by using its methods to seek divine transcendence, Agrippa avoided his teacher's weak claim of naturalness in favor of a more sweeping restoration.[35]

The Virtues and Powers

In DOP, as in Ficino, the bones of the natural world are the four elements, which combine and mix to form the fundamental structures and objects of nature. These structures are infused with virtues, which either arise from the elements (natural virtues) or descend from the stars (occult virtues). Thus occult virtues are hidden powers, not appreciable to the senses, such as magnetism; prime among occult virtues, however, is Life, that is the state of being alive, which is caused by the presence of a (usually) celestial entity which vivifies nature. Parallel to this natural structure, the skeleton of the celestial is made up of numbers, which combine through harmony and proportion to make up the celestial forces and powers. These powers are the source of life in nature, but they also participate in the third, divine world to a greater or lesser extent. Thus a chain of vivification hangs downward from God, through the celestial, and into nature, just as the architecture of the universe is ultimately founded upon the simple elements. The linguistic and theological implications of this descending chain will be the focus of chapters three and four below; in the current discussion we shall see how the basic structure functions in the natural sphere, the directly experientially accessible third of the creation.

DOP's account of the elements and the virtues is fairly standard, compiled from orthodox and reliable sources. For example:

> There are four elements, and original grounds of all corporeal things, Fire, Earth, Water, Air, of which all elementated inferior bodies are compounded; not by way of heaping them up together, but by transmutation, and union; and when they are destroyed, they are resolved into elements. For there is none of the sensible elements that is pure, but they are more or less mixed,

[35] On Trithemius's project to revitalize and defend magic, see Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, *passim.*, and particularly 152-60 where Agrippa is discussed vis-à-vis Trithemius.

> and apt to be changed one into the other: even as Earth becoming dirty, and being dissolved, becomes Water. . . .[36]

This account is complicated by a hierarchy of three orders: pure, compounded, and derivative (*decomposita*), in chapter I:4; we shall return to this in a discussion of alchemy.

Natural virtues, as mentioned before, are obvious and arise from the elements, while occult virtues on the other hand

> are not from any element . . . and this virtue is a sequel of the species, and form of this or that thing; whence also it being little in quantity, is of great efficacy; which is not granted to any elementary quality. For these virtues having much form, and little matter, can do very much; but an elementary virtue, because it hath more materiality, requires much matter for its acting.[37]

Much of *DOP*'s theoretical argument here comes from Ficino, or at least parallels that great magical thinker closely. Furthermore, the argument is scattered across many chapters, and rarely stated *as* an argument. Consequently it is simpler to analyze *DOP*'s theory of virtues by contrast with the Ficinian system which we have already discussed in detail; after this analysis I shall return to the question of *DOP*'s argumentative techniques.

As in Ficino, there are a number of basic kinds of force, which may be expressed elementally and sensibly as natural virtues, or spiritually and insensibly as occult virtues. The primary medium of virtues is the World-Spirit, which "by way of [being a] medium. . . unites occult virtues to their subjects,"[38] although other spiritual forms (the human spirit, etc.) may also serve this function. Although I do not find the division of *vis rerum, imaginum, musices,* and *verborum* explicitly stated, it will serve admirably to explain *DOP*'s divergence from *De vita*.

The *vis rerum* (power of things) is the exemplary form of natural magic, whose A and B divisions correspond to the natural and occult virtues. In *DOP*, as I have suggested, this division also corresponds to a direction of

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[36] *DOP* I:3, 89/8.

[37] *DOP* I:10, 104-105/32.

[38] *DOP* I:14, 112-14/44-45. This is J.F.'s translation of the second half of the chapter title: "De spiritu mundi quis sit et quod sit vinculum occultarum virtutum." This is a mistranslation, adding a good deal to the sense of the original, but it is also quite accurate. I translate "spiritus mundi" as World-Spirit throughout the present text; J.F. uses "Soul of the World" which is more poetic but somewhat confusing.

movement, rising up from the elements or descending from the stars. This is a critical issue for *DOP*: virtues act through a spiritual medium, either the World-Spirit or the human fantastic spirit, which are explicitly paralleled. Thus the *vis rerum* is always entirely natural in the strict sense that the forces employed are always part of the natural world.

The *vis imaginum* (power of images) is divided into an entirely licit A form, the *aesthetic* power of visual images, and a dubious B form, their *inherent* power. A golden talisman inscribed with a beautiful image of Apollo would combine the two powers—the beauty of the image gives it aesthetic power, while the golden medium gives it inherent power.

Now I have invented this particular example to raise a difficult question about Ficino's magic, one for which Agrippa supplies a possible answer. The talisman is clearly Solar, in that it is made of the Solar metal and inscribed with a Solar image. But does the representation of Apollo have Solar virtue because of an *inherent* or an *aesthetic* power? To put it another way, which form of the *vis imaginum* is capable of interpreting an image at what Panofsky called the iconographic level, where it becomes relevant that the beautiful man in the image is Apollo?

So far as I can tell, Ficino does not clearly distinguish these levels, and it is thus unclear whether the requirement of an intelligent interpretant falls into the licit A or the questionable B category. I think Ficino does not want us to examine this issue closely; he simply presumes that the talisman's interpretant will be a human viewer, and ignores the question of whether the celestial force attracted by the talisman will also have to be intelligent in order to be so attracted.

In *DOP*, however, this problem is handled quite logically: the A and B forms of *vis imaginum* are parts of two entirely different spheres. Chapters 23 through 34 list and explain the celestial ascriptions of various natural objects—metals, animals, plants, stones, etc., and it is thus explicit that to "draw not only celestial, and vital, but also certain intellectual and divine gifts from above,"[39] including by the B type of *vis imaginum*, is a central part of natural magic. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, the A type is part of the *celestial* magic.

This differentiation suggests a more general point about *DOP*'s natural magic. The *medium* of natural magic is never intelligent or entirely controlled by an intelligence. The World-Spirit, as we have seen, is merely

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[39] *DOP* I:38, 155/112.

an essence or medium not unlike the four elements; indeed it is the fifth essence. Similarly in mental magic, the medium is the fantastic spirit, the fantasy, which is significantly free of higher control by the reason. As we have seen, this avoidance of the manipulation of intelligences was a typical principle for the distinction between natural and demonic magic; *DOP* is rigidly consistent about it, not permitting the sort of blurry borderlines which we saw in Ficino and Trithemius.

The *vis musices* (power of music) is not sharply distinguished from *vis imaginum* in *DOP*, and the principles which apply to the latter will serve to explain the former. There are inherent and natural powers of musical notes which depend on their ruling celestials, and the effects of such powers seem to be entirely psychological, moving the passions.[40] The passions are part of the human natural structure, connected to the rational (celestial) and intellectual (divine) by the fantasy; as such, the power to influence passions implies a very high form of natural magic, but does not necessarily require the intervention of reason. Thus while the majority of the B division of *vis musices*, as well as all of the A division, falls squarely into celestial magic, there is some portion of the B division which is natural, in that it depends only on the inherent occult qualities of musical tones understood as a form of sound.

Finally we come to the *vis verborum* (power of words). Ficino approaches this in much the same way as he approaches the *vis imaginum*, by presuming that the intelligence affected by words' meanings is that of a human subject (patient), thus there are no demons necessarily involved, and therefore his use of chants and hymns is entirely "natural." We will not be surprised to find that *DOP* does not accept this solution, but in point of fact the handling of language in the natural magic is quite complex, and requires some analysis.

The crux of the Agrippan approach to *vis verborum* is the division we have come to expect: insofar as words are treated as sound or noise, they have a natural power; insofar as they are intelligent language requiring a rational interpreter, they are celestial. In the main, of course, language is not treated merely as sound, in *DOP* or elsewhere, so the majority of the discussions of language are in Book II, and will take up much of the analysis in chapter three. We would expect, then, that Book I would treat language in passing, as it did music. In fact, however, linguistic issues are

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[40] *DOP* I:45, 171/135.

scattered throughout the natural magic, with the bulk of the discussion in Book I's last few chapters. Before we can extrapolate an Agrippan definition of natural magic, we need to understand why language is so important.

Humans are divided into natural, celestial, and divine portions, in strict microcosm of the tripartite universe. According to *DOP*'s version of this common Neoplatonic theory, the body parts are subject to various spheres, just as gold is subject to the Sun, and also like gold they are fundamentally part of the natural world. The mental and spiritual powers, however, are *of* the three spheres, not merely under their influence; thus the senses are natural, reason celestial, and intellect divine. As was true for Ficino, the barrier between natural and celestial is bridged by the imagination, the *vis imaginativa*, generally called in *DOP* the fantasy.[41]

Thus human minds can affect nature the same way as can the stars: through a spiritual medium such as the World-Spirit or the *vis imaginativa*. So long as the part of the force or mind that causes the effect is not itself intelligent, the magic is natural, although only very slightly differentiated from celestial magic. For example, when passions work themselves out upon the body, this can be called natural magic, because the passions are close enough to nature to be themselves affected by the senses fairly directly. If reason motivates passions, the distinction between natural and celestial becomes essentially nil. But if reason affects the body directly, however, this is unquestionably celestial magic. We will return to mental magic in this chapter.

Having laid this groundwork, *DOP* sets forth a fairly straightforward argument with respect to language vis-à-vis natural magic:

> It being showed that there is a great power in the affections of the soul, you must know moreover, that there is no less virtue in words, and the names of things, but greatest of all in speeches, and motions, by which we chiefly differ from brutes, and are called rational. . . from that reason which is according to the voice understood in words, and speech, which is called declarative reason, by which part we do chiefly excel all other animals. For λογός [*logos*] in Greek signifies, reason, speech, and word.
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> Now a word is twofold, viz. internal, and uttered. An internal word is a conception of the mind, and motion of the soul, which is made without a voice. . . . But an uttered word hath a certain act in the voice, and

[41] These are slightly different, but the distinction is irrelevant at present; see page 68 below.

> properties of locution, and is brought forth with the breath of a man, with opening of his mouth, and with the speech of his tongue, in which nature hath coupled the corporeal voice, and speech to the mind, and understanding, making that a declarer, and interpreter of the conception of our intellect to the hearers. . . .
>
> Words therefore are the fittest medium betwixt the speaker and the hearer, carrying with them not only the conception of the mind, but also the virtue of the speaker with a certain efficacy unto the hearers, but also other bodies, and things that have no life. Now those words are of greater efficacy than others, which represent greater things. . . . Also those that come from a more worthy tongue, or from any of a more holy order; for these, as it were certain signs, and representations, receive a power of celestial, and supercelestial things. . . .[42]

This long passage, which incidentally does not appear at all in the Juvenile Draft, is fairly clear in the present context. The soul can affect things naturally so long as (1) it operates through the fantasy, and (2) it has a natural medium by which to extend from the fantasy to the target. Speech fits these two criteria, moving from an internal word through the fantasy to become an uttered word, which then acts through the natural medium of air, controlled by the bodily speech-organs and received by the ears, and enters the hearer's fantasy. Therefore the power of words themselves is entirely natural, albeit on the fine line with the celestial.

From this passage and the subsequent chapters, however, a subtle distinction arises, which we will examine in detail in the context of Book II: the power of *words* is natural, but the power of *meaning* is not. Furthermore, the aesthetic qualities of speech are only natural insofar as they are the *vehicle* of the message, but they are definitely celestial when they considered *part* of the message—if the medium is the message, then the medium is mathematical/celestial magic. This has the further implication that written language, which partakes of the iconic nature of images, is necessarily more purely celestial than is spoken, and it is for this reason that written language is discussed in the very last chapters of Book I, *after* the discussions of speech.

Clearly we cannot continue this analysis without the information found in Book II; the *vis verborum* must wait until next chapter. One final point needs to be made, however, with respect to *DOP*'s remark on *logos*. It is clear that words and speech have (at least) a natural and a celestial

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[42] *DOP* I:69, 231-32/211; the complete Latin text may be found in Appendix I.

existence, and there is some suggestion in I:69 that some words also have a divine existence. We have also seen that more powerful words, i.e. those which are strongly effective in both the natural and celestial spheres, tend to be those whose medium or vehicle has strong celestial qualities. If we try to imagine a perfect word, an ideal spoken expression, it would be one which is meaningful in all three spheres, whose medium has physical (natural), aesthetic (celestial), and divine characteristics. *DOP* does not overtly hypothesize such a perfect word; I leave it to the reader to consider whether the use of the Greek *logos* is simply a demonstration of "vague erudition," and whether it is relevant here that the original, full title of *De vanitate* ends, "and of the excellence of the word of God" (*atque excellentia verbi Dei*).

Nature and Natural Magic

At the opening of the present chapter we saw Agrippa's basic definition of magic:

> Magic is a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most secret things, together with the nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues thereof, as also the knowledge of whole nature. . . .[43]

At the very beginning of *DOP*, the three *kinds* of magic are further defined as follows:

> . . . [Wise men] seek after the virtues of the elementary world, through the help of physic, and natural philosophy in the various mixtions of natural things; then of the celestial world in the rays, and influences thereof, according to the rules of astrologers, and the doctrines of mathematicians, joining the celestial virtues to the former; moreover they corroborate and confirm all these with the powers of divers intelligences, through the sacred ceremonies of religion. The order and process of all these I shall endeavor to deliver in these three books: whereof the first contains natural magic, the second celestial, and the third ceremonial.[44]

The distinction is clear enough: natural magic is limited to nature, i.e. the sublunary world, and does not deal with "the rays, and influences" of the

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[43] *DOP* I:2, 86/5.

[44] *DOP* I:1, 85/3. The final portion reads: ". . . his libris . . . quorum primus contineat magiam naturalem, alter coelestem, tertius ceremonialem."

stars, nor with the "divers intelligences" of the supercelestial world. In the context of Ficino and Trithemius, however, this clear categorization cannot go unchallenged. Although Agrippa's general project of a restoration of magic is entirely in accord with that of his onetime master, the two magicians disagree sharply about "natural magic" and, by extension, about "nature".

In chapter 42 of *De vanitate*, Agrippa has another definition of natural magic, immediately preceded by the remark in chapter 41 that "many have divided Magic two manner of ways, that is natural and ceremonial."[45] The definition itself is in two parts, the first simply repeating that "natural magic is nothing else, but a singular power of natural knowledge. . . and . . . the active part of natural philosophy," etc. The second part, separated from the first by a very lengthy list of famous natural magicians from around the world, is worth quoting in its entirety:

> Natural magic then is that which, having intently beheld the forces of all natural and celestial things, and with curious searching found out their order, doth in such sort publish abroad the hidden and secret powers of nature: coupling the inferior things with the qualities of the superior, as it were by certain enticements, to cause a natural joining of them together, and thereof oftentimes do arise marvelous wonders: not so much by art as by nature, whereunto this art doth proffer herself as a servant when she works these things. For the magicians, as very diligent searchers of nature, bringing the things which are prepared by nature, applying and setting active things to passive ones, very often bring forth effects before the time appointed by nature, and these [effects] are by the common sort accounted miracles: whereas despite this they are but natural works, nothing else coming between but the foretaking of time: as if a man in the month of March would cause roses to bloom. . . .[46]

In other words, natural magic only causes effects which can and do happen by natural means; the magician encourages and delimits the effects, but the causes are entirely within nature. Furthermore, the underlying principle of natural-magical effects is that they involve the speeding-up of time, such as making flowers bloom out of season. Since this is simply encouraging nature to work faster than usual, "nothing else comes between," i.e. there are no intelligences involved in this magic at all, and so it is not demonic magic in any way.

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[45] *De vanitate* 41, 89/123.
[46] *De vanitate* 42, 90-91/124-25.

Let us conclude with a provisional definition arising from our analyses thus far: *natural magic is simply magic that does not involve intelligences.* This definition, of course, is essentially the same as those of Ficino and Trithemius; what sets Agrippa apart is (1) the rigidity of the category, and (2) the valuation which is applied to inclusion and exclusion.

As we have seen, Ficino and Trithemius include in natural magic many forms in which intelligences are involved; the explanations are generally weak, depending more on the moral acceptability of any given form of magic to the author than they do on the internal logic of the categories. Agrippa's natural magic, however, excludes almost everything that could possibly involve intelligences, and such forces as the powers of words or music which bridge the natural-celestial division are carefully split. This is not to say that Agrippa is entirely consistent, only that he is *more* so. His project to construct a coherent and systematic philosophy of magic requires him to focus his attention on categorical definitions; Ficino and Trithemius really have no such project, and as such the fuzziness of their definitions is a peripheral problem.

The fundamental issue of natural versus other kinds of magic, of course, is that of legality—such famous authorities as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas had accepted natural magic but anathematized demonic magic. Thinkers like Ficino and Trithemius thus focused their definitions upon a moral balance: if a given magical practice is licit, it must be natural. As we have already seen, however, Agrippa's project to restore the good name of magic leads him very far from this basic problematic, and he accepts celestial/mathematical magic and divine/ceremonial magic as equally legitimate as the natural variety.

If this provisional definition is fairly clear, it does not yet lay all the problems to rest. First, we have seen that the application of the human mind causes potential difficulties for the distinction between celestial magic and mental forms of natural magic; is there some principle that allows one to tell the difference with surety? Second, it has been more or less obvious from the beginning that Agrippa grants the legitimacy of non-natural magic; at the same time it is clear that such a position was wildly iconoclastic, not to say potentially dangerous. The crucial question, then, is *why* does he grant this legitimacy? The fact that the logic of the system requires it is worth noting, but it does not fully answer the question.

In order to unravel this difficulty, we need to examine more closely the position of the magus, the practitioner, in natural magic. To do this, I

shall take up Frances Yates's notion of "man the operator" and consider its relevance to *DOP* and to the skepticism of *De vanitate*.

The Practice of Natural Magic: Man as Operator

The so-called "Yates thesis" was a much-belabored subject over the last two decades of the historiography of science, not always with a clear vision of the contours of that thesis. At the same time, general agreement has been reached that Frances Yates, however exciting to read and think about, was wrong. Although I support that conclusion in broad terms, our examination of *DOP*'s natural magic will reveal that she was not always wrong, or was sometimes right in odd and surprising ways. Before moving on, then, it is worth examining the "Yates thesis."

> The reign of 'Hermes Trismegistus' can be exactly dated. It begins in the late fifteenth century when Ficino translates the newly discovered *Corpus Hermeticum*. It ends in the early seventeenth century when Casaubon exposes him. Within the period of his reign the new world views, the new attitudes, the new motives which were to lead to the emergence of modern science made their appearance.
>
> The procedures with which the Magus attempted to operate have nothing to do with genuine science. The question is, did they stimulate the will towards genuine science and its operations?[47]

To give her affirmative answer to this question, Yates postulated several steps leading to the scientific revolution, changes in worldview which promoted the advent of scientific thinking and thus of modern science. H. Floris Cohen summarizes her position in terms of five claims, of which two are relevant for an analysis of Agrippa: (1) magical fascination with numbers encouraged scientific mathematization; and (2) the power of an individual human magus to dominate nature encouraged an active, experimental approach.[48]

The former claim will concern us when we come to *DOP*'s mathematical magic in chapter three. The issue of an "operative" approach to nature,

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[47] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 449. For the present discussion, I set aside the question of whether the Hermetic or magical or occult movements were noticeably affected by Casaubon's "exposure" of Hermes.

[48] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 452; see Cohen, *The Scientific Revolution*, section 4.4.4, pp. 285-96.

though, is central to the natural magic of Book I, closely tied to the position of the magus in the relation between natural and divine.

> What has changed is Man, no longer the pious spectator of God's wonders in the creation . . . but Man the operator, Man who seeks to draw power from the divine and natural order.[49]

I suggest that Yates's interpretation is essentially accurate, but since it is not clear how "Man the operator" is equivalent to "Man the scientist" it is extremely difficult to correlate her insight to a better understanding of sixteenth century science.

There are really two parts to the "operative" thesis: the active position of the magician with respect to the universe, and the way in which this activity is expressed. The first is linked to Man the microcosm, which in Yates's understanding makes the magician an active participant in the forces of the universe. As we have already seen, the power of the human mind as an active force is a significant problem in Book I, and it is to this problem that the present section will turn; the next section focuses on the epistemology of such active participation in nature. Thus the current issue is "Man the operator," while the next section takes up "Man the scientist."

Natural Magic and the Mind

The discussion of the mind and its powers really begins in chapter 58, "Of the reviving of the dead, and of sleeping, and wanting victuals many years together,"[50] which opens with the following theoretical statement:

> The Arabian philosophers agree, that some men may elevate themselves above the powers of their body, and above their sensitive powers; and those being surmounted, receive into themselves by the perfection of the heavens, and intelligences, a divine vigor. Seeing therefore that all the souls of men are perpetual, and also all the spirits obey the perfect souls; magicians think that perfect men may by the powers of their soul repair their dying bodies with other inferior souls newly separated, and inspire them again. . . .[51]

In the next chapter but one, we read that "It happens also sometimes, that not only they that are asleep, but also they that are watchful do with a kind of instigation of mind, divine. . . ," and that this is most common among

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[49] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 144.
[50] *DOP* I:58, 206-10/181-3.
[51] *DOP* I:58, 206-207/181.

melancholics.[52] This is immediately followed by a lengthy chapter on the construction and constitution of the human body, senses, appetites, and passions. Thus it is established that people, being made up of elements and virtues (including life) like all other natural things, are subject to superior, i.e. celestial and divine influences.

Chapter 61 discusses "the forming of man" in fairly standard terms. The parts of the body are made up of elemental mixtures, "subjected to the service of the soul," with the head assigned the noblest forms "as the tower of the whole body. . . ."[53] The five external senses are related to the four elements in hierarchical order: highest is sight, related to Fire; next hearing and Air; smell has "a middle nature betwixt the Air, and the Water;" taste is related to Water; and lowest of all is touch, corresponding to Earth. This hierarchy is further demonstrated by range: sight works at the greatest distance, taste and touch the shortest, although "the touch perceives both ways, for it perceives bodies nigh; and . . . by the medium of a stock or pole."

There are four interior senses, following Averroes: "common sense," which "doth collect, and perfect all the representations which are drawn in by the outward senses." Second is imagination, which "represents nothing," but rather "retain[s] those representations which are received by the former senses, and . . . present[s] them to the third faculty . . . which is the fantasy. . . ." Fantasy is the power to judge or discern "what or what kind of thing that is of which the representations are" and then to place the constructed judgements into memory, the fourth interior sense.

Fantasy is in a way superior to the others, "belonging to all the powers of the mind," because it receives impressions both from below (the senses) and above (the incorporeal mind) and assigns them to their proper places. Most importantly for our purposes, it "forms all the actions of the soul, and accommodates the external to the internal, and impresses the body with its impression." In other words, the fantasy acts as a bridge between the natural or corporeal mind and the celestial, incorporeal mind; at the same time, the fantasy is within nature and not entirely subordinated to the powers of the incorporeal mind.

This incorporeal mind:

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[52] *DOP* I:60, 212/188.

[53] *DOP* I:61, 216-19/193-94; subsequent quotations are from this chapter until otherwise noted.

> hath a double nature, the one, which inquireth into causes, properties, and progress of those things which are contained in the order of nature, and is content in the contemplation of the truth, which is therefore called the contemplative intellect. The other is a power of the mind, which discerning by consulting what things are to be done, and what things to be shunned is wholly taken up in consultation, and action, and is therefore called the active intellect.

There is thus a tripartite hierarchy of the powers of the mind: the external senses, the internal senses, and the incorporeal mind. Parallel to this, there are three appetites:

> the first is natural, which is an inclination of nature into its end . . . : another is animal, which the sense follows, and it is divided into irascible, and concupiscible: the third is intellective, which is called the will. . . .

Here a critical distinction is drawn. The animal appetites refer always to things presented to the senses, and as such always deal with external things, "desiring nothing unless in some manner comprehended." The will, on the other hand, is free, not only in the normal theological sense, but also in that it stands on the far side of the corporeal/incorporeal divide, and as such need not refer only to external things, nor to real ones. As such it is possible to will impossible things—"as it was in the devil, desiring himself to be equal with God"—and most importantly for our present purposes, it is possible to will things that do not (yet) exist.

When the will is applied to impossible or depraved ends, this leads to four wilful passions: oblectation, which is suppression of the mind in favor of pleasure; effusion, which goes beyond oblectation such that "the whole power of the mind . . . is melted;" "vaunting and loftiness," i.e. arrogance, in which the will glories in some imagined good not actually accomplished; and finally "envy, or a certain kind of pleasure or delight at another man's harm, without any advantage to itself."

As *DOP* moves on from Chapter 61 to discuss the mind more generally, "we find eleven passions . . . which are love, hatred; desire, horror; joy, grief; hope, despair; boldness, fear; and anger."[54] The critical point about these passions is that they are linked to the body through the fantasy, as we saw above. Indeed, "The fantasy, or imaginative power hath a ruling power over the passions of the soul when they follow the sensual

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[54] *DOP* I:62, 220/197.

apprehension."[55] Thus a strong passion can alter the body, either by moving the spirit (turning red with anger) or by imitation, "as in setting the teeth on edge at the sight or hearing of something, or because we see or imagine another to eat sharp or sour things. . . ."[56]

Having established that there are logical reasons for the power of the passions over the body and vice-versa, by means of the fantasy, *DOP* takes the logical next step in chapter 65, "How the passions of the mind can work out of themselves upon another's body."[57]

> Therefore let no man wonder that the body, and soul of one may in like manner be affected with the mind of another, seeing the mind is far more powerful, strong, fervent, and more prevalent by its motion than vapours exhaling out of bodies; neither are there wanting mediums, by which it should work, neither is another's body less subjected to another's mind, than to another's body. Upon this account they say, that a man by his affection, and habit only, may act upon another.[58]

Several examples are adduced, such as the fact that a man bitten by a mad dog becomes mad, or that "the longing of a woman with child doth act upon another's body, when it signs the infant in the womb with the mark of the thing longed for."[59]

This chapter ends with a "teaser," a hint of great things to come in Book II: "Now then, if the aforementioned passions have so great a power in the fantasy, they have certainly a greater power in the reason. . . and lastly, they have much greater power in the mind." This remark is unexplained, except that "by this means we read that many miracles were done by Apollonius, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Philolaus, and many prophets, and holy men of our religion."[60]

Natural Magic and the "Operative" Magus

Over the course of Book I, several critical points have been established independently, making the conclusion of Agrippa's section on the mind inevitable. First, natural things are subject to celestial influence. Second,

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[55] *DOP* I:63, 221/199.
[56] *DOP* I:64, 222/201.
[57] *DOP* I:65, 225-27/204-5.
[58] *DOP* I:65, 226/204-5.
[59] *DOP* I:65, 225/204.
[60] *DOP* I:65, 227/205.

this influence can and often does produce occult virtues. Third, these virtues can be made operable by art. Fourth, the core of the human mind is within the natural sphere, and as such subject to celestial influence. Fifth, the celestial portion of the human mind can be brought to bear to influence other people. Sixth, and most important, all these effects and wonders are entirely natural and normal, parts of the constitution of the world.

Human minds, at the celestial (rational) level, can thus influence natural bodies, and in fact often cannot help doing so—falling in love, becoming angry, crying out in fear, or wincing at someone else's discomfort are all effects of the celestial mind on the natural body. Moral judgment does not apply here, except in the sense that envy or lust are sinful; fear, empathy, or love have nothing to do with sin. Therefore, suggests *DOP*, manipulation of natural things by celestial forces is licit, natural magic.

In our provisional definition of natural magic we excluded the use of intelligences, but in light of mental magic this exclusion needs complication. An act of magic has three relevant parts: the source of magical force, the medium through which it operates, and the object acted upon. Clearly the intelligence of the source is irrelevant in *DOP*, for without the human mind all mental magic would be excluded. The object acted upon seems equally irrelevant, since natural magic can affect others' minds and passions. The critical issue in natural magic seems to be the medium: if the magic operates only through the natural World-Spirit or the equally natural human fantasy, then the magic must *ipso facto* be natural.

We are far from the timid pseudo-natural magic of Ficino. It is difficult to imagine Ficino supporting this extremist mental magic, and more difficult to imagine him citing Thomas Aquinas to make the point, as Agrippa does in chapter 67, "How man's mind may be joined with the mind, and intelligences of the celestials, and together with them impress certain wonderful virtues upon inferior things."[61] The chapter ends with a warning, inserted in the final version:

> Everyone therefore that is willing to work in magic, must know the virtue, measure, order, and degree of his own soul, in the power of the universe.

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[61] *DOP* I:67, 229-30/208; there are references throughout this chapter to *Summa contra gentiles*, 3:87, 3:85, 3:25, 3:92; Ficino actually does use this reference, but to different effect (*Three Books on Life*, 3:8).

Let us return to Yates's notion of the "operative" magus, with which this section began. It is now fairly clear that, as Yates suggested, the magus of *DOP* stands above nature to some degree—certainly the magus does indeed "draw power from the divine and natural order." In particular, we have seen that it is the human *mind* which stands above nature, following the traditional ascription of reason and intellect to a higher sphere.

At the same time, although Yates's conception of the magus is relatively accurate here, it is unclear what, if anything, this operative approach has to do with a scientific one. If Agrippa theorized a magus with considerable power, both of knowledge and of action, over nature, this does not in itself strengthen Yates's claim that magic promoted science.

What is missing is *application*. In a discussion of Chinese alchemical thought, the chemist and historian of alchemy Nathan Sivin pointed to a problem which is the mirror-image of that which confronts us:

> Our ability to grasp the import of its theories is the key to understanding both the aims and results of Chinese alchemy. The empirical content of alchemy has little significance unless we know what it meant to the alchemist, within what framework he understood it. If one of the elixirs of immortality, for instance, turns out to be more or less pure metallic arsenic, it is tempting to chalk this up as another accomplishment of Chinese science. But are we justified in doing so if we find out that the elixir was not considered different in kind from, say, calomel or vermilion?[62]

In the case of *DOP* and Yates's "operative magus" theory, the situation is precisely reversed. Yates's argument is founded upon the notion that empirical content is irrelevant for understanding magic vis-à-vis science. Rather than claiming, as did Sivin's opponents, that a given empirical discovery (such as metallic arsenic) is automatically an achievement for a culture's science, Yates claims that a given *theoretical stance* evidences such achievement; thus an interest in the power of numbers is *ipso facto* a move toward mathematization, regardless of the empirical content of this interest in numbers, e.g. a fascination with numerology.

We cannot accept either extreme. Sivin's question (or its inverse) is pertinent: if a given theoretical stance or position is analogous to a later crucial development in the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, it is tempting to consider that stance another achievement for magical science,

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[62] Nathan Sivin, *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 27.

as it were. But are we justified in doing so if we find that the theory was not considered different in kind from a theological position?

In the next section, then, we must begin to answer these questions by focusing on the relationship between "empirical content" and theory—in particular, we need to focus on experimentalism, and the relationship between experience and reason.

Magic and Skeptical Philosophy: Experience versus Reason

In a passage quoted above, Yates proposed the connection between magic and science which has occupied us in the previous section:

> The procedures with which the Magus attempted to operate have nothing to do with genuine science. The question is, did they stimulate the will towards genuine science and its operations?[63]

But is it in fact true that magical operations "have nothing to do with genuine science?" Yates probably has in mind various Kabbalistic conjurations and such, but in the context of natural magic, it is very difficult indeed to find an absolute division between scientific and magical operations. We have seen that "man the operator" is at the very top of natural magic, standing in a dominant relationship to nature. In the present section, I want to follow up the implications of Yates's question by asking what "man the operator" has to do with "man the scientist," or rather, "man the experimenter."

H. Floris Cohen notes that Yates leaves unexplored "easily the most plausible of the various causal connection she adduced between the Hermetic movement and the rise of early modern science," i.e. the potential connection between an activist and an experimental approach to nature.[64] This connection was realized primarily in the figure of Francis Bacon, whose ideas developed at least partly in the context of earlier magic and alchemy.[65] If *DOP* grants a dominant and operative position to the magus, can it be said that Agrippa points toward an experimental approach? If so, we would be on fairly firm ground in claiming for him

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[63] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 449.

[64] Cohen, *Scientific Revolution*, 293.

[65] See especially Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

a significant position among the early sixteenth-century predecessors of the scientific revolution.

In order to explore this possibility, it is important to take up the problem of Agrippa's skepticism, and further to relate it to his opinion of practices or ideas whose relationship to the scientific revolution is strongly established. For the present analysis, then, I will consider, first, Agrippa's skepticism and its epistemological implications, and second, his stance vis-à-vis alchemy, which Yates dubbed "the Hermetic science *par excellence*."[66] I will argue that there are indeed glimmers of an experimentalism in *DOP* and *De vanitate*, but that they are considerably more tenuous than the "Yates thesis" might suggest.

Skepticism

The important of the skeptical revival in the Renaissance has been generally recognized in the last few decades, particularly since the publication of Richard Popkin's definitive study.[67] What has not always been clearly recognized is the importance and congruence of magical and scientific thought with skepticism in its early modern form.

The question of skepticism and magic is of particular importance when dealing with Agrippa, who not only wrote *DOP* but also that monument of satirical skepticism, *De vanitate*, which so influenced Montaigne and others. It is crucial, when reading *DOP*, to see that the two works not only do not contradict one another, but actually complement each others' arguments. I shall make this case briefly at the end of the chapter, and more deeply in the conclusion of the present work; for the moment, something needs to be said about skepticism in general, and its relation to natural magic (and science) in particular.

Pyrrhonist or Pyrrhonian skepticism originated in the Hellenistic period, and argued "that there was insufficient and inadequate evidence to determine if any knowledge was possible, and hence that one ought to suspend judgment on all questions concerning knowledge."[68] Skepticism of this sort is in no way equivalent to modern skepticism, characterized by

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[66] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 150.

[67] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

[68] Popkin, *Scepticism*, xiii.

thoroughgoing doubt about unproven and especially nonmaterial claims. On the contrary, many Renaissance skeptics can be labeled "fideists":

> Fideism covers a group of possible views, extending from (1) that of blind faith, which denies to reason any capacity whatsoever to reach the truth . . . , to (2) that of making faith prior to reason. This latter view denies to reason any complete and absolute certitude of the truth prior to the acceptance of some proposition or propositions by faith . . . even though reason may play some relative or probable role in the search for, or explanation of the truth. In these possible versions of fideism . . . knowledge, considered as information about the world that cannot possibly be false, is unattainable without accepting something on faith, and . . . independent of faith sceptical doubts can be raised about any alleged knowledge claims.[69]

The Pyrrhonists brought to bear a number of devastating arguments, particularly the unreliability of the senses, the imperfect nature of human reason, and the logical impossibility of finding a fixed standard by which to judge truth-claims.

Popkin argued implicitly, and Cohen explicitly, that the Pyrrhonist revival stimulated the rise of experimental science. Cohen summarizes the scientific-skeptical position as follows:

> The sceptics are right: It is not given to man to gain knowledge of the essence of things, and nature is not necessarily wholly transparent to our understanding. But the sceptics are wrong, too, for the inescapable limitations of human reason and sense experience do not condemn us to ignorance. Rather, we can construct a science of how phenomena appear to us, with our experience serving as a guideline and the verification of predicted experiences as a criterion.[70]

Popkin did not think much of Agrippa's contribution to the revival of skepticism, describing *De vanitate* as "fundamentalist anti-intellectualism," although he granted that "it represents a facet of the revival . . . and it had some influence in producing further interest in sceptical thought."[71] He also noted its influence on Montaigne and Descartes.

As I shall argue periodically throughout the present work, Agrippa's skepticism is not so much anti-intellectual as peculiarly fideist. For Agrippa, the scientific-skeptical position is unacceptable, because it

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[69] Popkin, *Scepticism*, xix-xx.
[70] Cohen, *Scientific Revolution*, 199.
[71] Popkin, *Scepticism*, 24-25.

presumes the inherent value of "a science of how phenomena appear to us." In the magical world of *DOP*, such a goal is entirely unworthy of the high estate of man.

Of all the conclusions of Pyrrhonist skepticism, the most devastating criticism is the lack of a single absolute standard. All knowledge is relative, in that every piece of data depends on other data. This is the same problem which faces Eco's "irresponsible" deconstructionists: without something solid to ground interpretation, we can make any text say anything at all, and we are left with unlimited semiosis (see page 23 above). What is required, then, is either (1) some absolute point of reference, or (2) a strong gradation or hierarchy which, if it does not fix interpretation solidly, at least keeps it within approximate guard-rails.

Descartes, of course, sought an absolute point in the *cogito*; Montaigne, like Eco in a way, relied on the common sense of reasonable people. We could go on: Paul Ricoeur's guard-rails are hermeneutic circles, Manfred Frank's human subjectivity, and so on.

In *De vanitate*, however, Agrippa chose as an absolute point of reference faith in Christ, which left him in a bind. It is no help to have a point of reference if that point is transcendent, because the value of the absolute point is its relativity to other potential knowledges, i.e. that it can be used as a standard from which to judge data. Thus it is necessarily the object of *DOP* to connect the absolutely transcendent divine with the other objects and structures of the universe. If this goal can be achieved, the magus, at least, is able to salvage truth from the wreckage of skepticism by referring always to the divine. At the same time he himself attains transcendence, for absolute knowledge of the universe as it depends from the divine is divine knowledge.

Agrippa's Alchemy: Part 1

The "Hermetic science par excellence," alchemy, can in general terms be said to fit this description: it is an art by which the magus, through manipulation of the objects and structures of the universe, attempts to attain both transcendence and absolute or divine knowledge of the universe. At the same time, it is immensely difficult to define "alchemy" in a way consistent with all its various usages in the medieval and early modern periods, to say nothing of the alchemical practices of non-European cultures. Fortunately, this definitions problem is only peripherally relevant to the present discussion, since Agrippa predates the great

revolution in early modern alchemical thought—the Paracelsian revolution.[72] To examine the contours of Agrippa's alchemical interests, however, a modicum of historiographical definition is necessary.

One scholarly take on alchemy is medico-chemical (iatrochemical), and seeks the origins of modern chemistry, medicine and pharmacology in alchemical thought and practice. This is not to say that such scholarship wishes (nowadays) necessarily to tout alchemy as science, or proto-science (á la Frazer, in a sense), but rather to understand the ways in which the origins of certain chemical, clinical, and especially pharmacological ideas arise in the work of alchemical practitioners. Critical questions often focus upon experimental theory and method, as manifested (for instance) in an alchemist's unwillingness to accept traditional authority over his own observations. Such scholarship is not, so far as I can tell, particularly interested in definitions—it is largely irrelevant here whether a given thinker was or was not an alchemist; what is at stake is that thinker's ideas, particularly with respect to specific movements and developments in natural philosophy, medicine, and science.

A very different approach was pioneered by Mircea Eliade in *The Forge and the Crucible*, a comparative study of alchemical and metallurgical traditions around the world. Eliade took it as a basic assumption that "alchemy" was a complex, a pattern of thought and practice which had parallels in numerous societies. He argued that the primary component of this complex was a linkage between mastery of nature and mystical transcendence: "the alchemist takes up and perfects the work of Nature, while at the same time working to 'make' himself." Ultimately, alchemy was a spiritual pursuit grounded in a "demiurgic enthusiasm": "in taking upon himself the responsibility of changing Nature, man put himself in the place of Time; that which would have required millennia or aeons to 'ripen' in the depths of the earth, the metallurgist and alchemist claim to be able to achieve in a few weeks."

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[72] The scholarly literature on Paracelsus and his intellectual descendants is enormous and ever-expanding. Walter Pagel's *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, 2d ed. (Basel, New York, etc.: Karger, 1982) is still indispensable, while Allen G. Debus's works on the English and French Paracelsians admirably cover a wide swath of Paracelsus's intellectual descendants. For the most up-to-date bibliographies, one could hardly do better than to survey recent articles in *Isis* and *Ambix*—research on Paracelsus is in flux, and any attempt by a non-expert such as myself to cover its grounds can only be outdated soon after its writing.

> . . . [T]he great secret lay in discovering how to 'perform' faster than Nature, in other words . . . how, without peril, to interfere in the processes of the cosmic forces. Fire turned out to be the means by which man could 'execute' faster, but it could also do something other than what already existed in Nature. It was therefore the manifestation of a magico-religious power which could modify the world and which, consequently, did not belong to this world.[73]

For Eliade's alchemist, then, mastery over nature entailed marriage with her, and consummation of the union of natural and celestial gave birth to a divine, "perfected" being.

DOP is not saturated with alchemical terminology, and as I will show, Agrippa's relationship to that art was more than a little hesitant. In order to make sense of the data, we need at all times to keep in mind these two scholarly approaches to the history of alchemy, which we will see replicated to some degree in Agrippa's own thought.

Alchemy is mentioned only four times in the entirety of *DOP*. There is a single explicit mention of alchemy in Book I, with reference to the World-Spirit or *quinta essentia*:[74]

> [T]he alchemists endeavor to separate this Spirit from gold, and silver; which being rightly separated, and extracted, if thou shalt afterward project upon any matter of the same kind, i.e. any metal, presently will turn it into gold, or silver. And we know how to do that, and have seen it done: but we could make no more gold, than the weight of that was, out of which we extracted the Spirit. For seeing that is an extense form, and not intense, it cannot beyond its own bounds change an imperfect body into a perfect: which I deny not, but may be done by another way.[75]

Chapter 4 of Book II, "Of unity, and the scale thereof," mentions the art in passing:

> There is one thing created of God, the subject of all wondering, which is on Earth, or in heaven; it is actually animal, vegetable, and mineral, everywhere found, known by few, called by none by its proper name, but

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[73] Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin, 2d. ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79; the previous quotes are from pages 47 and 169.

[74] The index to the critical edition of *DOP* lists an additional mention of alchemy at the end of chapter 11 or the beginning of chapter 12, but I do not find this reference.

[75] *DOP* I:14, 113-14/45.

> covered with figures, and riddles, without which neither alchemy, nor natural magic, can attain to their complete end, or perfection.[76]

The two remaining references are in Book III, one of which is merely a reference to Geber,[77] the other a remark that "heaven . . . doth those things, which the force of the fire cannot do by its natural quality (which in alchemy is most known by experience). . . ."[78]

The first passage quoted above, on gold-making, suggests that this form of alchemy, while reasonable and coherent in terms of the general structure of nature and of natural magic, is rarely if ever successful, and it can hardly be taken as a pro-alchemical statement. The second passage, however, is more oblique, its rhetoric suggestive of a passage in Trithemius to which we shall return momentarily.

We have seen that the natural world rests upon the four elements of classical Aristotelian theory; this is complicated by a hierarchy of three orders: pure, compounded, and derivative (*decomposita*), appearing in a key chapter I:4:

> Of the first order are the pure elements, which are neither compounded nor changed, nor admit of commixtion, but are incorruptible, and not of which, but through which the virtues of all natural things are brought forth into effect. . . .
>
> Of the second order are the elements that are compounded, changeable [*multiplicia et varia*], and impure, yet such as may be by art reduced to pure simplicity, whose virtue, when they are thus reduced to their simplicity, doth above all things perfect all occult operations and operations of nature: and these are the foundation of all natural magic.
>
> Of the third order are those elements, which originally and of themselves are not elements, but are derivative [*decomposita*], various [*varia, multiplicia*], and changeable one into the other. They are the infallible medium, and therefore are called the middle nature, or soul [*anima*] of the middle nature. Very few there are that understand the deep mysteries thereof. In them is, by means of certain numbers, degrees, and orders, the perfection [*consummatio*] of every effect in what thing soever, whether natural, celestial, or supercelestial; they are full of wonders, and mysteries, and are operative, as in magic natural, so divine. . . .[79]

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[76] *DOP* II:4, 256/241.

[77] *DOP* III:36, 509/580: "Et Geber in *Summa Alchymiae* docet. . . ."

[78] *DOP* III:49, 553/627; we shall return to this passage in chapter 4 (page 195 below) in the context of the Venusian frenzy, which transmutes the magus through love.

[79] *DOP* I:4, 90-91/10; the complete text appears in Appendix I.

This tripartite hierarchy derives from Trithemius, as Vittoria Perrone Compagni has noted; further, as Noel Brann has made clear, the structure was central to the Abbott of Sponheim's magical theology.[80] Trithemius describes "three principles of natural magic without which no marvelous effect can be performed" and links them explicitly to Pythagorean numerology. The first principle is the Unity, the second the evolution of the monad into the binary, and the third the evolution into multiplicity through ternary, quaternary, and denary. The second principle is at "the center of natural magic," while the third "is the consummation of the number of the grades and of the order through which all the philosophers of the secrets of nature and inquirers of the truth of God have pursued their marvelous effects."[81] According to Brann, this third principle was that in which "Trithemius perceived the transformation of theoretical into operational magic" without ever slipping from licit natural magic into illicit demonic magic:

> Success in the operation, [Trithemius] insisted, is dependent on a spiritual transformation, via series of spiritual stages from the denarium to the unity, within the soul of the operator. "Whoever has been elevated to the uncompounded and pure state of utter simplicity," as he put this idea to Westerburg, "may be perfect in every natural science, may bring marvelous works to pass, and may discover amazing effects." . . . [Trithemius also puts it another way,] this time suggestive of alchemical imagery: "If a man is reduced to his own unified simplicity by a suitable cleansing through purifying fire, he is permitted to plumb the depths and perform all the mysteries of possible knowledge."[82]

In *DOP* I:4 too, the rhetoric is suggestive of alchemy, though neither so explicit nor so internally-directed as Trithemius's:

> Let no man therefore, without these three sorts of elements, and the knowledge thereof, be confident that he is able to work anything in the occult sciences of magic, and nature. But whosoever shall know how to reduce those of one order, into those of another, impure into pure, compounded into simple, and shall know how to understand distinctly the nature, virtue, and power of them in number, degrees, and order, without

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[80] Perrone Compagni, notes to *DOP* I:4, 90, line 25 - 91, line 27. See Noel Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 112-35, esp. 117-18.

[81] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 118; reference to Trithemius, letter to Westerburg, 95-96.

[82] Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 118; quoting Trithemius, letter to Westerburg, 82-83 and 84.

> dividing the substance, he shall easily attain to the knowledge, and perfect operation of all natural things, and celestial secrets.[83]

In the context of Trithemius's clearly alchemical rhetoric, two major questions cannot help but arise here: First, is *DOP*'s "knowledge . . . of all natural things, and celestial secrets" equivalent to the Great Work, the alchemist's central preoccupation? Second, given that where Trithemius refers to the purification of the operator, *DOP* mentions only "whosoever shall know how to reduce those of one order, into those of another," does this difference imply a non-transforming alchemy, an anti-alchemical stance, or perhaps a search for some knowledge which would itself be transforming?

Recall Eliade's idea that "the alchemist takes up and perfects the work of Nature, while at the same time working to 'make' himself," that alchemy was "the manifestation of a magico-religious power which could modify the world and which, consequently, did not belong to this world." While it has been argued that medieval alchemy does not fit this model, there is little question that Renaissance alchemy indeed generally focused upon the transmutation of human souls into spiritual gold by sympathetic or analogical connection to the transmutation of metallic elements in the crucible.[84] Trithemius, as was implied above (and as Brann makes explicit), used stock alchemical imagery and metaphor to represent various stages and aspects of human transcendence to the divine, and while there is no reason to imagine that the abbot of Sponheim worked at the forge and crucible himself,[85] certainly his rhetoric fits Eliade's mystical conception of the spagyrical art.

The very tenuous connection established between Agrippa's occasional terminology and a broader complex of mystical-alchemical transmutation is of questionable value. First, it is by no means clear that this terminology has the force with which the Trithemian (and Eliadean) contexts have invested it. Second, there is essentially nothing here which strongly

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[83] *DOP* I:4, 91/10.

[84] This generally agreed-upon point has nothing whatever to do with the previously stated definitional difference between historians of science and historians of religions; it is a question of emphasis—where Eliade (for instance) took the mythological and theological side of this transmutation as the central and only issue at stake in his understanding of alchemy, historians of science generally place this terminology of transcendence in the context of broader developments in natural philosophy.

[85] Indeed, Trithemius denied such practices strenuously; see Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology*, 99.

suggests a mystical end. Finally, and most importantly, there is simply not enough data here from which to draw a strong conclusion. Rather than continuing to dig in *DOP* for such slight hints, then, let me move to the far larger and more direct discussion of alchemy in *De vanitate*.

Alchemy in De vanitate

The position of alchemy in Agrippa's works is problematic because, as is so often the case, *DOP* and *De vanitate* do not appear to agree. At the same time, the *De vanitate* text is exceptionally rich and complex, while *DOP* skirts around the issue to a surprising degree. In the present discussion, I argue that there is no single "Agrippan" position on alchemy; the majority of the extant texts are hostile to alchemical practice, and while the possibility of a higher, transcendent alchemy is open, I suspect Agrippa himself had little faith in the Great Work.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter (page 25 above), Agrippa seems to have joined or formed a kind of secret society when he was a young man, probably in the period 1507-1509. There is good reason to think that the members practiced alchemy in a material sense; a letter in 1509 has Agrippa setting up "our usual alchemical shop."[86] Indeed, Nauert argues that Agrippa's early interest in practical alchemy was quite considerable at this time, and not mere flimflam to attract the wealthy and foolish:

> Although he doubtless counted on his alchemical work to attract interest and perhaps was not above intimating that his work was more successful than it really was, it is likely that Agrippa was as earnest in his efforts to transmute metals as in his search for a patron.[87]

If it is thus clear that the young Agrippa practiced alchemy with at least some degree of seriousness, his late attitude toward the art is far less so.

Chapter 90 of *De vanitate*, on alchemy, is unusually complex and difficult. On the one hand it includes an attack on the art which is relatively unoriginal in content but bitingly satirical and engagingly written. On the other hand, it appears to permit exceptional license to alchemists on the grounds that the author himself is an alchemist! My

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[86] *Epistolae* 1, 10 (January 24, 1509), 687: "instructa solita nostra chrysotoci officina;" quoted in Nauert, 24n.41.

[87] Nauert, 25.

suspicion is that the entire piece is an unusually cruel and bitter attack, perhaps motivated by Agrippa's own experience with alchemy, but it is hard to know whether this reading is entirely sufficient.

The primary criticism of alchemy, by no means original to Agrippa, is that most alchemists are confidence tricksters who take money from their victims by promising them gold; alchemists deceived by their own lies end up diseased and destitute:

> [So] they fill the ears of a credulous man with words, that they may void his purse of money; and to whomever they pledge a fortune, from him they demand funds. . . . and through this monstrous imposture they drive [their victims] to puff air at furnace mouths by the opening and closing of purses [*follibus auram impellere fornacibus*].[88] And there is no sweeter madness than to believe that the fixed can be made volatile, and the volatile fixed; so the most repulsive coals, sulfur, excrement, venom, urine, and all harsh pains are to you sweeter than honey, until eventually all their possessions, merchandise, and patrimony are boiled away, and transmuted into ash and smoke, all the while they have cheerfully promised the rewards of their long labors, and a golden fetus to be born, and perpetual health and youth; and when at last they have spent their substance, then they begin to grow old, aged, ragged [*annosi, pannosi*], and starving, always smelling of sulfur, soiled ink-black among the coals, paralytic from the continual handling of quicksilver, with nose-effluence their only affluence, and generally so miserable that for three pennies they would sell their souls. . . .[89]

A secondary criticism, equally common in such attacks, is that alchemical texts are written in an impenetrable jargon which hides its vanity behind a veil of pseudo-erudition:

> [M]ost people [have come] to believe that all the books of that art were only quite recently invented, which opinion is given not a little credence by such authors as Geber, Morienus, Gilgilidis, and the rest of that crowd of obscure and otherwise uncelebrated names, and also by the discordant terms which they use for things, the inelegance of their writing, and their twisted way of philosophizing.

As usual in the *De vanitate* chapters on magic, however, Agrippa constructs a kind of loophole, through which the *true* form escapes being

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[88] A pun on *follis*, a bellows or a leather purse; literally "to blow air at furnace-mouths with bellows."

[89] *De vanitate* 90, 263-64/329, my translation; the complete, corrected Latin text appears in Appendix 2.

tarred with the same brush as the false. In the discourse on alchemy, this loophole is exceptionally obvious and unsubtle:

> I could say moreover a great many things about this art (to which I am not entirely inimical) if I had not sworn, as is usual for those who are initiated into the mysteries, to keep silence.

A little later, we come to the following extraordinary passage, which I reproduce in full:

> In truth, it would take too long to recount all the foolish mysteries of this art, and the vain riddles of the Green Lion, the Fugitive Hart, the Fleeing Eagle, the Dancing Fool, the Dragon devouring its own tail, the Swollen Toad, the Crow's Head, the black which is blacker than black, the Seal of Hermes, the Mud of Foolishness (of wisdom, I should say), and of innumerable similar trifles; and finally of that one single blessed thing, beside which there is no other, which may be found everywhere, the foundation [*subiecto*] of the most holy Philosophers' Stone, to wit—I have almost idly let slip the name of the thing, whereby I should be sacrilegious and perjured. Yet I will speak, by circumlocution, and more obscurely, that none but the sons of the art and they who have been initiated into the mysteries, may understand. It is a thing, which has substance, and is not overly Fiery, nor altogether Earthly, nor simply Watery, nor of a very sharp or very blunt quality, but in between, and light to the touch, and in a way tender, or at least not hard, not unpleasant, and really rather sweet to the taste, agreeable to the smell, delectable to the sight, pleasant and jocund to the hearing, beautiful[90] to the imagination. I may say no more, though there be things greater than these; but I deem this art, on account of the familiarity which I have with it, especially worthy of that honor by which Thucydides defines an honest woman, saying "she is best of whom in praise or censure there is least talk."

In light of Eliade's mystical alchemy, or Trithemius's alchemical rhetoric for that matter, the obvious reading of this passage is a mystical, transcendent one: we are to cast off the "trifles" of gold-making and so forth, and seek the sublime truth and wisdom of the Philosopher's Stone. Such a reading is certainly in accord with Agrippa's generally positive attitude towards magico-religious techniques and ideas, and is further supported if we suppose that he agreed with his one-time master Trithemius, who (as

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[90] All late editions read *latum* (large or wide), but the *editio princeps* and at least one other very early edition read *laetum* (beautiful), which makes more sense in the context.

we have seen) wrote grandly of the Great Work while holding the usual gold-making alchemy in contempt.

My suspicion is that this reading is a misreading; I argue instead for an ironic and satirical understanding of this passage. Irony can never really be proven, absent some contemporary comment from the author telling us how the passage was *meant*, and of course the notion of intention is itself highly problematic. Rather than fight with futility, I will simply state my reasons for reading this passage as I do and move onward.

First, Agrippa was closely tied to the humanist movement inaugurated by Petrarch which, among many other factors, promoted elegance of Latin expression as against the medieval bastard Latin common in scholastic works. Note also the passage cited above in which alchemical writers are denounced for "the discordant terms which they use for things, the inelegance of their writing, and their twisted way of philosophizing." Furthermore, note that the entirety of *De vanitate* cap. 90 is an exuberant rhetorical exercise, with many plays on words, intricate logic, considerable erudition, and (in my opinion) significant literary grace.[91] I suggest that this interest in clarity and grace cannot be squared with the lengthy, somewhat ridiculous "not *this* but not *that*" rhetoric of the "Philosophers' Stone" passage.

Second, the description of the Philosophers' Stone is so vague as to be meaningless. Alchemical texts of the sort parodied here use various obscure terms to avoid giving their meaning directly—a marriage between the White Lady and the Black King produces the Red Man, etc. Without knowing what these terms mean, as both chemical processes and metaphors of spiritual transmutation, it is essentially impossible to make sense of such discussions. This sort of jargon is parodied in the sentence preceding that of the Stone: "the Green Lion, the Fugitive Hart, . . . the Mud of Foolishness (of wisdom, I should say)." The description of the Stone, on the other hand, is perfectly comprehensible, and gives the semblance of deep meaning, but could actually refer to a vast range of objects—given the reference to Thucydides, it is entirely possible that this description is of a beloved woman.

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[91] I am hardly qualified to comment authoritatively on the literary merits of late Latin prose; the complete text is provided (Appendix 2) for those who are. The density and complexity of this chapter, described by one reviewer as "too difficult even for specialists in the field," should strongly encourage a serious critical translation of *De vanitate*, supported by philological analysis.

Third, it is worth noting that the description given here is not precisely that of the Philosophers' Stone—it is a discussion of "the foundation [*subiecto*] of the most holy Philosopher's Stone," which Agrippa cannot bring himself to name. Earlier in the chapter, however, he sneered at the Stone itself:

> So they . . . presume to forge (as they say) a certain blessed Philosophers' Stone whereby, like Midas, all bodies touched are changed into gold and silver. Moreover they endeavor to draw a certain quintessence from the highest inaccessible heavens, by the enormous power of which they promise not only more riches than Croesus had, but also, by expelling old age, youth and perpetual health, and even immortality.

Fourth, the humorous (if somewhat affected) style of the opening of this description passage casts doubt on the seriousness of the passage itself:

> . . . the foundation of the most holy Philosopher's Stone, to wit—I have almost idly let slip the name of the thing, whereby I should be sacrilegious and perjured; yet I will speak, by circumlocution, and more obscurely, that none but the sons of the art and they who have been initiated into the mysteries, may understand.

Last, I think the "loophole" is somewhat out of character. As we have seen before, and will become more apparent over the course of the present work, *De vanitate* often appears to be in conflict with *DOP*, but a careful reading of the former usually reveals some logical solution by which they can be made to agree. In the case of the discourse on alchemy, no logic is required—the loophole is simply a flat refusal to speak. Given the satirical tone of *De vanitate* as a whole, I think we cannot take this seeming about-face terribly seriously.

Magic, Experience and Reason

I have suggested several times that *De vanitate* does not fundamentally contradict *DOP*, and that they are in many respects complementary. Although we will return to this question in chapter five, our current preoccupation with *De vanitate* and alchemy requires that we elaborate upon the problem of Agrippa's skepticism vis-a-vis his magic.

In his analysis of Agrippa's thought, Charles G. Nauert proposed some interesting ideas about the mutual relations among science, magic, and skepticism, in particular suggesting a distinction between the empirical

and the theoretical. In *De vanitate*, Agrippa criticized the former on the grounds of unreliability:

> Now since the senses are often deceived, certainly they can prove no test [*experientia*] genuine to us. Moreover since the senses can in no way reach the intellectual [side] of nature, and [since] the inferior causes of things, from which their natures, effects, and properties or passions must be demonstrated, are by common consensus entirely obscure to our senses, is it not certain that the way of truth via the senses is barred? wherefore also all those deductions and sciences which are founded at their roots upon these very senses, all must be uncertain, erroneous, and fallacious.[92]

According to Nauert, "in attacking the various occult arts of prognostication, [Agrippa] does not deny that there may be some factual truth in their predictions. Rather, his favorite charge . . . is that [these arts'] defenders can allege . . . only fortuitous experiences to uphold their claims."[93] As Agrippa himself puts it, ". . . it is necessary that we impugn the error of all these arts for no other reason, than this, that they clearly lack all reason. . . ." Despite all those who have supported chiromancy, "nevertheless they all can show nothing beyond conjectures and observations of experience."[94] In other words, it is a sufficient criticism that the proponents of such arts have anecdotal data but no solid theories with which to ground them.

At least in *De vanitate*, then, it appears that Agrippa is an extreme anti-empiricist. At the same time, as we shall see shortly, Book I of *DOP* often privileges experience over reason.

Nauert proposes a reconciliation:

> By the time he wrote *De vanitate*, Agrippa argued that any higher patterns of explanation, in the occult arts or in any science, are merely arbitrary constructs of the human mind without any objective existence. This is true of the various astronomical cycles, epicycles, signs, and houses; it is also true

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[92] *De vanitate* 7, 34-35/49: "Iam enim cum sensus omnes saepe fallaces suint, certe nullam nobis synceram probare possunt experientiam. Praeterea cum sensus intellectualem naturam nequeant attingere, et rerum inferiorum causae, ex quibus illarum naturae effectus, et proprietates seu passiones demonstrari deberent, sint omnium consensu nostris sensibus penitus ignotae, nonne convincitur veritatis via sensibus esse praeclusa? quare etiam omnes illae deductiones et scientiae, quae in ipsis sensibus radicitus fundatae sunt, omnes incertae erunt, et erroneae, et fallaces." See also Nauert, 298, text and note 23.

[93] Nauert, 214.

[94] *De vanitate* 35, 83-84/112-13: "Verum harum omnium artium errorem non alia ratione nobis impugnare necesse est, nisi eaipsa, quod deficiunt videlicet omni ratione. . . . omnes tamen ultra coniecturas, et experientiae observationes tradere queunt nihil."

> of metaphysical concepts. Real but possibly erroneous sensory knowledge and arbitrary intellectual patterns: after all has been said, these still survive the general intellectual wreckage produced by *De vanitate*.[95]

By this reading, at least, *DOP* does not flatly contradict *De vanitate* in that the former retains the "real but possibly erroneous sensory knowledge" and attempts to build a coherent "arbitrary intellectual pattern" out of them. Indeed, Nauert argues that, for Agrippa, "All patterns of interpretation . . . are artificial and arbitrary, the magical ones no more so than any others. So one may adopt them provisionally as long as they are useful."[96] Thus the distinction between empirical and theoretical knowledge leads to a parallel distinction between a utilitarian approach to practical knowledge, typified by the natural magic of *DOP*, and an epistemological critique of the accessibility of truth, typified by the skepticism of *De vanitate*.

In the context of our preceding discussions, Agrippa's magical skepticism would constitute a third position, simultaneously supportive and critical of both the former's utilitarian bracketing (to use a term from phenomenology) of the trans-sensory, and the latter's demand for systematic truth. From Nauert's point of view, Agrippa's juggling of these positions tended toward "an adumbration of the idea of hypothesis and its subjection to the test of facts, a procedure that characterizes the methodology of modern science."[97]

Nauert's reading of Agrippa's skepticism overstresses the parallel between Agrippa's skepticism and scientific thought. Nevertheless his insight is of critical importance for understanding how it is possible for Agrippa to hold so many apparently contradictory views and defend them all with such vigor. For these various apparently irreconcilable positions are not, as has sometimes been supposed, merely passing notions in what Nauert called "the odyssey of Agrippa's mind." On the contrary, he is not only aware of the contradictions but defends them.[98] Furthermore the weight of Nauert's analysis suggests that the reconciliation of magic and skepticism might lead strongly toward the natural sciences as they would appear in the seventeenth century.

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[95] Nauert, 215.

[96] Nauert, 215-16.

[97] Nauert, 216; see also *Epistolae* 5, 25 (12 February, 1528), in which Agrippa defends the various practical and occult arts on the grounds of usefulness.

[98] See Nauert, 216:"No path seemed too much out of the way to be explored, even though Agrippa might on another occasion develop its opposite just as fully."

Agrippa's Alchemy: Part 2

The references to alchemy in *DOP* and *De vanitate* can be reconciled by following up a variant of the experience/reason distinction, the distinction of practice and theory. On the practical side, Agrippa attacks every aspect of the praxis of alchemy, apparently sparing nothing: this is alchemy as gold-making, confidence tricks, and the "sweet madness" by which "eventually all their possessions, merchandise, and patrimony are boiled away, and transmuted into ash and smoke." On the theoretical side, Agrippa attacks certain goals:

> So they seek to alter the species of things, and presume to forge (as they say) a certain blessed Philosophers' Stone whereby, like Midas, all bodies touched are changed into gold and silver. Moreover they endeavor to draw a certain quintessence from the highest inaccessible heavens, by the enormous power of which they promise not only more riches than Croesus had, but also, by expelling old age, youth and perpetual health, and even immortality.

We know also that "the senses are often deceived, [and] certainly they can prove no test [*experientia*] genuine to us." This suggests that *experientia* equals practical reality, more specifically *sensibly perceptible reality*. Furthermore "since the senses can in no way reach the intellectual [side] of nature, . . . the way of truth via the senses is barred." Therefore it can be said that natural experience, that is to say knowledge derived from practical interaction with nature, is without certainty and even the potential for truth.

Experience, then, understood in this naturalistic sense, requires *reason*, meaning both *theory* and the *celestial human ratio*. Without reason in the celestial sense, no natural thing can be perceived or understood by a human observer—there is no means by which a human observer may observe the phenomena, and no mind to interpret the data once observed. Without reason in the theoretical sense, no natural thing can be understood—there is no structure against which to categorize and analyze the phenomenon. In these discussions, then, we must recognize that *ratio* carries both meanings.

Let us continue to follow this line. Recall that Ficino understood all forces and powers to have a necessary endpoint, a *telos*; we have seen nothing to suggest that Agrippa disagreed. Indeed, I would argue that nature itself has a *telos* which, given the structure of the Neoplatonic

cosmos, must necessarily be celestial. In other words, without the celestial, without reason, nature has no meaning, no purpose.

Alchemy, like all natural magic, simply brings forth and encourages natural forces and processes, as for instance speeding time in the crucible to quicken the gestation of gold from base metals. Giambattista della Porta expressed this particularly well:

> Art being as it were Nature's Ape, even in her imitation of Nature, effecteth greater matters than Nature doth. Hence it is that a Magician being furnished with Art, as it were another Nature, searching thoroughly into those works which nature doth accomplish by many secret means and close operations, doth work upon Nature, and partly by that which he sees, and partly by that which he conjects and gathers from thence, takes his sundry advantages of Nature's instruments, and thereby either hastens or hinders her work, making things ripe before or after their natural season, and so indeed makes Nature to be his instrument.[99]

At the same time, some alchemical goals and claims (immortality, elemental transmutation, transcendence) require powers far beyond nature. According to Aristotelian elemental theory, with which Agrippa does not essentially disagree, natural substances cannot be transmuted into other substances within nature—such transformation is *transubstantiation*, such as the wafer and wine becoming flesh and blood in the Mass. Transubstantiation cannot occur in nature, and requires the interference of a divine presence—a miracle. To transmute lead into gold would similarly require a miracle, though perhaps a relatively minor one; thus to complete the Great Work would require a miracle and so demonstrate and consecrate the holiness of the alchemist.

In order to accomplish its goals, then, alchemy must transcend the natural—its goals and *telos* must be within the celestial and divine realms. In theory, such transcendence would validate the art; indeed, alchemy can only possibly be valuable or valid insofar as it goes outside of nature, transcends nature—in the Eliadean sense alone can it be worthwhile for Agrippa. But in order so to transcend nature entirely, alchemy must cast aside the imitation of nature, the entire notion of "discovering how to 'perform' faster than Nature" as Eliade put it. In this case, it becomes something quite other than alchemy.

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[99] Della Porta, *Natural Magick*, 73-74; also quoted in Eamon, 217.

There remains one possibility, which takes us far outside what can be derived from Book I or *De vanitate*. Alchemy in a broad sense could survive the "intellectual wreckage" of *DOP* and *De vanitate* if the grounds of transmutation, the crucible, were translated into the trans-natural, something rational but participating in both the natural and the divine. The obvious possibility here is the human microcosm, fundamentally residing in the rational but bound to the natural and reaching toward the divine; indeed, this is exactly the Eliadean sense of alchemy absent any of the technical terminology or chemical practices. But once such trappings are removed, could it not be said that language, and particularly the purely rational *written* language, fits these characteristics, at least *in potentia*? Can we imagine a text which would fit all these criteria? Which would itself be a microcosm?

Three possibilities leap to mind, all of them I think accurate to *DOP*, though we cannot as yet prove this. First, of course, is the Divine Word, the *logos*, Christ, whose incarnation enables natural magic and skepticism to solve their difficulties by providing an entirely human, hence natural, and yet entirely transcendent, divine goal and absolute point of reference. Second, parallel to the first, is the Divine Word as Scripture, itself a microcosm of the universe. Finally, and I think most interestingly, *De occulta philosophia* itself can be read as this perfect microcosm of the universe and of man. In a sense, where the alchemist used a crucible to construct a controlled and perfect microcosm, Agrippa's crucible was *DOP* itself.

Conclusions

What has all this gained us? We have come to see that *DOP*'s natural magic is defined idiosyncratically, that in it the human mind stands in a peculiarly dominant and yet external relationship to nature, and that Agrippa's radical skepticism undercuts the entirety of the natural-magical project. In sum, we have learned that the natural magic of *DOP* is incomplete, depending from higher spheres and realities which in themselves have no place in natural magic.

DOP's natural magic leads up to an end which, in good skeptical fashion, hangs from an external point. As yet, we cannot confidently identify that point; we have insufficient data. We know that it is in some way rooted in the mind, or rather, that it is analogous to the internal

mental relations among intellect, reason, and imagination/sense, by way of fantasy. We know further that it is something to which purely phenomenal knowledge does not pertain—this is the basis of skepticism. Beyond this, we can only make guesses at this stage.

I have already hinted at the final conclusion of this line of reasoning, as it progresses through the entirety of *DOP*; for the moment, I note a few relevant items.

First, the skepticism of *De vanitate* is congruent with the basic outlook of *DOP*, which suggests that the external reference point must be divine, and specifically must relate to the Word of God—"excellentia verbi dei." Second, we should take seriously the structure of the work, not only in its division into three books parallel to three worlds, but also within each world; this suggests that the concluding chapters of Book I on language and word stand in a conclusive, superior position with respect to the rest of natural magic—again, "excellentia verbi dei." Finally, we must recognize the fundamental limitation of a radically exterior point of reference to ground knowledge, i.e. that it cannot be connected to anything interior to the system; in other words, the choice of a divine point of reference demands either a renunciative, apophatic mysticism, or some instance of a crossing, at which the divine becomes entirely natural, or the natural divine—a third time, "excellentia verbi dei." In sum, I suggest that the natural magic must be read as leading up to Christ, the incarnation in nature of the Divine Word.

Unfortunately, this also entails that the natural magic requires (depends from) the celestial and especially the divine magic. In other words, these claims and questions about the natural magic cannot satisfactorily be answered absent evidence from Book II and Book III. At the same time, we have some idea of what we expect to find in those books.

In Book II, we will see an analysis of language and form; that is, a linguistic theory which enables the Incarnation to connect to the problem of interpretation, i.e. of the mind's dominance over natural things. In Book III, we will see conclusive evidence that the status of the interpretant, the magus, is analogous to that of the Logos, producing a kind of intellectual mysticism which is anything but negative or apophatic. In essence, Books II and III will demonstrate what is implied by Book I, that magic enables the human soul of the magus to achieve an understanding of God which moves from natural voice to written language and beyond, transcending language to achieve unity with the Word.

But before turning to these later books, let us return to our historiographical problems.

Science, Magic, and the Yates Thesis

The great problem with the "Hermetic" debate was that scholars did not fundamentally agree about what "science" is or was, which necessarily led into a historiographical *cul-de-sac*. Admittedly the debate is now more or less defunct, it having been agreed that the "Yates thesis" was, if not wrong, then at least exaggerated, but the more basic problem remains. I suggest that our investigation of *DOP* can help clarify the issue.

Yates herself drew an important distinction which strongly suggests what she meant by science:

> The basic difference between the attitude of the magician to the world and the attitude of the scientist to the world is that the former wants to draw the world into himself, whilst the scientist does just the opposite, he externalises and impersonalises the world by a movement of will in an entirely opposite direction to that described in the Hermetic writings. . . .[100]

H. Floris Cohen points out a crucial conclusion which Yates drew from this distinction:

> [T]he persistence of Hermetic patterns of thought throughout much of the 17th-century adventure in science betrays an acute awareness, among many though not all the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution, that their new science, however irresistible in its intellectual sweep, caused an attendant loss of insight into the endlessly complex makeup of the human personality—not without consequence for man's future handling of nature.[101]

Although Yates's conception of science as opposed to magic is simplistic, her argument about the relationship of scholar (scientist or magus) to "world" is worth salvaging if we add a little precision. First, as suggested by the quotation-marks in the previous sentence, the notion of "world" cannot stand. In *DOP*, the three worlds are fundamentally distinct, though connected. In order to avoid category mistakes in comparing science and magic, we must limit "the world" to the world of *nature*.

To go further, it is just such a limitation which constitutes the distinction I think Yates had in mind. The "externalizing" of nature Yates

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[100] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 454.
[101] Cohen, *Scientific Revolution*, 182.

considered preeminently scientific sees nature as fundamentally different from the metaphysical aspects of humanity (mind, spirit, soul). In this conception, the study of nature must exorcize the effects of the scholar from the experiment, because such effects cannot be studied with the same tools as can nature. However philosophically problematic we may find the scientist's goal of objectivity, it is logically necessary once a distinction between physical and metaphysical is accepted. Rather than externalizing and impersonalizing nature "by an act of will," the scientist surrenders the will as an object of study in order to study better the workings of nature.

Yates is right to contrast this conception with Hermetic doctrine, as the latter rests so fundamentally upon the microcosm. If man is a microcosm, then the study of his metaphysical aspects is necessarily part of any analysis of nature. After all, purely natural (e.g. biological) examination of can humanity rarely focus on those parts of human nature most critical for distinguishing between humans and other living beings, those constitutive of human culture such as language, religion—even magic. Thus the preeminent object of study for the Hermeticist must be the *relationship* between scholar and universe. If it is found that certain tools, particularly those of the natural sciences normally conceived, cannot accurately be applied to this fundamentally metaphysical relationship, then those tools must be acknowledged as inadequate to the object of study.

Further precision can be applied to Yates's formulation by recognizing that her "internalizing" and "externalizing" are not actions but *axioms*: the scientist limits study in order to attain specific goals, while the magician, denying the validity of such a limitation, must examine the totality of the universe. It may be said that the scientist, in this conception, is required to believe in progress, in that he or she contributes data and conclusions to an ever-growing mass of scientific information on the assumption that future generations will synthesize it and answer large questions; this was certainly the point of Bacon's House of Solomon in his *New Atlantis*. In Yates's Hermetic conception, the magician cannot so parcel out the work, because one cannot evaluate the truth of a datum until it has been fitted into the grand scheme, particularly since the physical senses are unreliable.

I do not claim that this exegesis of Yates's definition-by-distinction really solves the problem of definition, nor do I think Yates herself would have been entirely happy with the conclusions I draw. I do think, however, that it goes some way toward understanding both the natural magic of *DOP* and its ambivalent relationship to the development of modern science.

Art, Nature, and Science

Although we are hardly ready for conclusions, it is perhaps valuable to assess Agrippa in light of the scientific revolution at this point. Modern historiography of that revolution tends to work from the general premise that the development of modern experimental science entailed not only a series of specific discoveries—the circulation of the blood, the heliocentric solar system, the calculus and Newtonian mechanics, etc.—but also a number of crucial theoretical and methodological shifts. To evaluate Agrippa as a forerunner of the scientific revolution, then, it is necessary to view his work in the context of shifts in world-view or approach.

There are two such intellectual movements which provide useful context. First, of course, is the revival of skepticism. There can be little doubt of the influence of this revival upon many major figures in the scientific revolution, Descartes and Bacon being perhaps the most obvious. It is equally indisputable that Agrippa made an influential and important contribution to the skeptical revival by writing *De vanitate*, and the fact that Descartes read this book as a young man further strengthens the connection. At the same time, it is worth considering the fact that Agrippa's skepticism was violently opposed to phenomenal knowledge; indeed *De vanitate*'s most direct opposite might well be Bacon's *Novum organum*. In chapter five below, we will return to this question of *De vanitate*, skepticism, and the scientific revolution, but it is already clear that, to the extent that his book contributed to the projects of Descartes and Bacon, Agrippa would likely have objected to such as misuse and misreading.

The work of Paolo Rossi on Francis Bacon provides a second theoretical context for evaluating Agrippa's science. Rossi argued that Bacon worked towards an annulment of the classical Aristotelian distinction between art and nature, which proposed a sharp and inviolable boundary between the two. Rossi's claim, in short, is that Bacon's understanding of technology undermined the art-nature division, in that he thought such inventions as gunpowder or the compass could be useful for investigating nature, both as instruments and as objects of study.[102]

On the other hand, William Newman has recently suggested that the blurring of the art-nature division which occurs in Bacon was strongly foreshadowed by alchemical literature. Newman's point is that the notion

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[102] Rossi, *Francis Bacon*.

of art as "Nature's Ape" and the related concept that art can make nature perform her works more rapidly than usual, provide essentially the same critique of the art-nature division as did Bacon. Furthermore, Newman points out, alchemical apologists have a habit of defending their art by reference to the wonderful technical accomplishments which it has produced, particularly gunpowder, chemical dyes, and glass. Again, he argues, the valorization of technological developments in Bacon can be seen to trace directly back to Bacon's considerable knowledge of his alchemical forebears.[103]

All the points emphasized by Newman appear clearly and explicitly in Agrippa. The definitions of natural magic in both *De vanitate* and in *DOP* itself point to a notion of art as emulation of nature which, when properly employed, encourages nature's operations. Similarly, the only portion of the *De vanitate* piece on alchemy which could be read apologetically discusses the alchemists' technical accomplishments, of which Agrippa provides a familiar list:

> I do not deny that through this art many very excellent crafts had their beginnings. From hence came the compositions of azure, cinnabar [*cinnabrii*], cinnabar [*minii*], purple, and what is called musical gold, and other colors. We are indebted to this art for orichalcum[104] and the alloys of all metals, their bindings and assaying, and their separations. The gun is the terrible invention of that art. Hence also came the most noble art of glass-making, of which one Theophilus has written an excellent book.[105]

This is not to suggest that Agrippa's work laid the groundwork for Bacon's. As Newman shows, the partly undermined division between art and nature considerably preceded not only Bacon but Agrippa as well, and there was certainly nothing very new about Agrippa's restatement. At the same time Agrippa's writings undeniably influenced later thinkers. If it is impossible to claim that Bacon got his notions of art and nature from Agrippa, it is also unnecessary; what is relevant is that Bacon need not have gone far afield in his reading. In sum, I suggest that Thorndike's assessment of *DOP* as "valuable in a scattering way for its bibliography" is,

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[103] William R. Newman, "Alchemical and Baconian Views on the Art-Nature Division," in Allen G. Debus and Michael T. Walton, eds., *Reading the Book of Nature: The Other Side of the Scientific Revolution* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1998), 81-90.

[104] Here probably brass.

[105] *De vanitate* 90, 262-66/328-32.

oddly enough, accurate—thinkers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries likely used it in precisely this way, as a kind of reference volume. If Agrippa made little other direct contribution to the scientific revolution, he nevertheless deserves recognition for this.

A Theory of Language?

Our reading of Agrippa's skepticism leans heavily on a distinction between "real but possibly erroneous sensory knowledge" and "arbitrary intellectual patterns." If Agrippa's "real skepticism concerned . . . the jump from sensory knowledge to the higher levels of ratiocination,"[106] we must recognize that this is for *DOP* primarily a problem of *communication*: how do the senses communicate with reason and the intellect? which in the macrocosm is equivalent to the question, how does the natural world communicate with the divine?

This is a metaphysical and linguistic problem of no mean proportions, and it remains the most pressing question at the end of the natural magic. The foundation of divine-natural communication has been laid by the Incarnation of Christ, as suggested above; nevertheless, it is hard to see how this singular instance could ground every possible reflection of the basic problem. In essence, what is required is a theory of language which can support all the weight already placed upon it.

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[106] Nauert, 214.

CHAPTER THREE

SIGN, SIGIL, TEXT

On the Study-table a book there lay,
Which Agrippa himself had been reading that day;
The letters were written with blood therein,
And the leaves were made of dead men's skin;

And these horrible leaves of magic between
Were the ugliest pictures that ever were seen,
The likeness of things so foul to behold,
That what they were is not fit to be told.

—Robert Southey

The natural magic of Book I ends with a discussion of writing, in chapters 73 and 74. When we consider these chapters as transitional, developing the argument of *DOP* towards mathematical magic, certain points arise immediately.

First, we have seen that the natural magic is at heart a magic of logos, a magic bound up with the Incarnation, with the immanent, physical presence of God in the world, which grounds language in the material. The mathematical or celestial magic should, logically, be the magic of writing, and hence of Scripture. This is confirmed by the explicit focus of the two transitional chapters, "Of the virtue of writing. . ." and "Of the proportion. . . of letters. . . ."[1]

Second, writing in *DOP* follows on from the mind, which as we have seen extends up to the mathematical and celestial sphere: "Now writing is the last expression of the mind, and is the number of speech and voice. . . ."[2] Similarly, the extension of language into the celestial sphere is

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[1] *DOP* I:73, 240/221, De virtute scripturae et de imprecationibus et inscriptionibus faciendis; *DOP* I:74, 241/223, De proportione, correspondentia, reductione literarum ad signa coelestia et planetas secundum varias linguas cum tabella hoc indicante.

[2] *DOP* I:73, 241/221: "Scriptura autem ipsa ultima mentis expressio est, sermonis vocisque numerus. . . ," passage not in W.

logically superior to the fallen nature of speech, for the many human languages divided at Babel

> have according to their diversity received divers, and proper characters of writing, consisting in their certain order, number, and figure, not so disposed, and formed by hap, or chance, nor by the weak judgment of man, but from above, whereby they agree with the celestial, and divine bodies, and virtues. . . .[3]

Writing simultaneously rests upon the prior existence of speech and depends from the superior reality of the celestial. To understand the mathematical is to approach the written, and vice versa. Book II thus explicates the magic of writing from number through character to name.

We have seen (page 66 above) that Frances Yates understood the magic of *DOP* to depend on an "operative" conception of the magus; what has not been sufficiently stressed is that this operative conception was for Yates associated particularly with mathematical magic. Although she incorrectly concluded that such a stance vis-à-vis mathematics laid the foundations for the scientific mathematization of nature, her insight to correlate mathematics and operative power is of considerable value. In this chapter, then, we will consider how *DOP* understands the activity of magical power.[4]

The natural magic, as we saw, develops towards its completion in the incarnation of the Word of God in Christ. At the same time, we saw no evidence of a theory of language as such, nor any clearly theorized channel

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[3] *DOP* I:74, 241/223: ". . . quae quidem linguae iuxta suam diversitatem etiam diversos ac proprios receperunt scripturae characteres, suo quodam certo ordine, numero et figura constantes, non fortuito, nec casu, nec fragili hominum arbitrio, sed divinitus sic dispositos atque formatos, quo cum coelestibus atque ipsis divinis corporibus virtutibusque consentiant. . . ," chapter not in W.

[4] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, esp. chapter 8, "Renaissance Magic and Science," pages 144-56, in which mathematics and number is seen as a "master-key" to the development of science from magic. In this context, it is worth considering the implications of Giordano Bruno's fifth definition of magic: "The fifth meaning includes, in addition to [natural magic] . . . the use of words, chants, calculations of numbers and times, images, figures, symbols, characters, or letters. This is a form of magic which is intermediate between the natural and the preternatural or the supernatural, and is properly called 'mathematical magic', *or even more accurately 'occult philosophy*" (emphasis mine). Bruno seems to mean that "occult philosophy" is a broad understanding of celestial or mathematical magic, suggesting that in his opinion, book II of *DOP* is the key to the whole work. As we shall see, Bruno's reading is correct; it is unfortunate that previous scholars of Agrippa have generally ignored the interpretive testimony of those whom he influenced deeply. See Giordano Bruno, "On Magic," in *Cause, Principle and Unity, and Essays on Magic*, ed. and trans. Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Lucca, 105-42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 105.

for communication between the divine and the natural apart from the special instance of Christ. It is not surprising, given the structure of *DOP*, that we find this explication of communication in Book II, midway between the natural and the divine.

As we move through the celestial magic, the theory of language and signification begins to become clear. We learn the constituent parts of language and how they relate, the different ways in which signs can refer to objects, and the potential effects of such reference. As mentioned above, we also see that written language is granted a privileged position in the scheme of language, and begin to understand that privilege.

Exemplum: Magic Squares and Figures

Natural magic is relatively easy to imagine, being based upon the manipulation of concrete objects—magnets, stones, animals, etc. Mathematical magic, however, hinges upon practices which correlate mathematical, geometrical, and formal abstractions with material objects; as such, the magic of Book II is quite alien to our experience. For clarity's sake, then, let us begin with a concrete, practical example.

Chapter 22 is entitled "Of the tables of the planets, their virtues, forms and what divine names, intelligences, and spirits are set over them."[5] It contains a series of magic squares and magical figures (*signacula, characteres*) with minimal explanation.[6] The seven heavenly bodies, in order from farthest to nearest, are connected to magic squares of order three through nine (there being no possible squares of orders one or two), giving Saturn the square of three, Jupiter that of four, and so forth up to the Lunar square of order nine. Each square is expressed in both Arabic numerals and Hebrew *gematria*, the traditional Hebrew numbering system, in which numbers from 1 to 9, 10 to 90, and 100 to 900 are represented by letters of the alphabet. Attached to each square is an abstract planetary character (*character*) and two or three sigils (*signacula*) connected with various spiritual beings of the planet, generally an

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[5] *DOP* II:22; 310-12/318-28.

[6] The terminology of these figures is difficult to translate, as will become clear over the course of the discussion. Three terms are problematic:*signaculum, sigillum,* and *character*. *Character* I render with its cognate. *Sigillum* I translate "seal," which in *DOP* generally refers to a seal pressed in wax. *Signaculum*, often translated "seal," I have used "sigil." I use "figure" as a general term, following *DOP*'s *figura*.

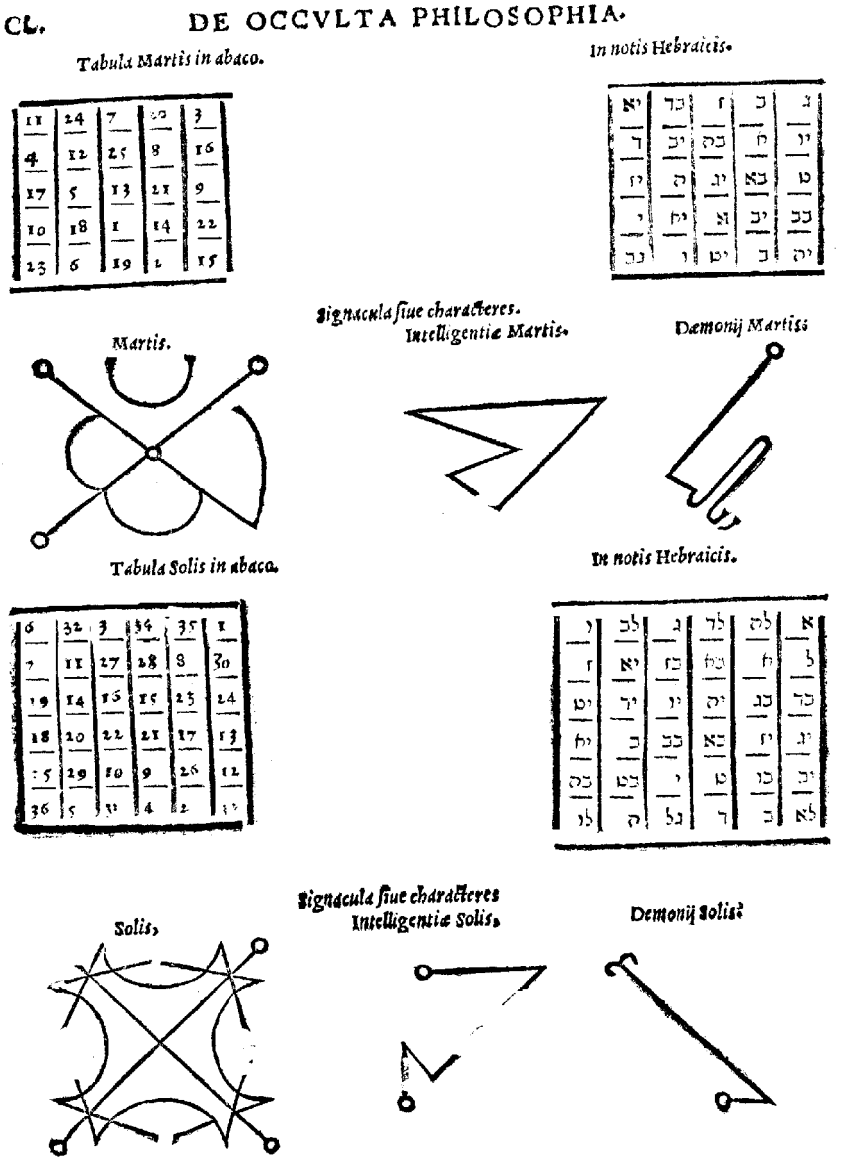

Figure 2: Magic squares, sigils, and characters, *DOP* II:22, 316/325.

"intelligence for good and a demon for evil."[7] From the rather gnomic text, it is apparent that these sigils and characters derive from the demons' names and the relevant magic squares, using the numerical values of letters described in preceding chapters of *DOP*. The description of the Saturnian square follows:

> Of these the first is assigned to Saturn, and consists of a square of three, containing the particular numbers of nine [i.e. the numbers one to nine], and in every line there are three [numbers], in every direction, and along each diameter a total of fifteen, the sum of all the numbers being forty-five. Over this are set such divine names as fill up the numbers, with an intelligence to what is good and a demon to what is evil; out of the same numbers is drawn the sigil or character of Saturn and of the spirits thereof, such as we shall beneath ascribe to its table.[8]

There is also some general information about how these figures can be inscribed upon talismans, and what they may be used for. The chapter ends,

> Now how the sigils, and characters of the stars, and spirits are drawn from these tables, the wise searcher, and he which shall understand the verifying of these tables, shall easily find out.[9]

Magic Squares

A magic square is a numerical table made up of consecutive numbers, such that the sum along any row, column, or complete diagonal (corner-to-corner) is constant. One generally describes such squares by the number of rows or columns; thus a square of order four is one with four rows and four columns, and

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Figure 3: Magic square, order 3

[7] Sample page over, figure 2.

[8] *DOP* II:22, 310/318: "Harum prima, Saturno adsignata, ex quadrato ternario constat, continens particulares novem et in qualibet linea tres quaqueversum et per utrunque diametrum constituentes quindecim, tota autem numerorum summa quadraginta quinque. Huic ex divinis nominibus praeficiuntur praedictos numeros implentia nomina cum intelligentia ad bonum et daemonio ad malum; eliciturque ex eisdem numeris signaculum sive character Saturni et spirituum eius, quales inferius suae tabulae adscribemus."

[9] *DOP* II:22, 312/320: "Qualiter autem eliciantur signacula et characteres cum stellarum, tum spirituum ex istis mensulis, sagax scrutator et qui harum mensularum verificationem intellexerit facile invenire poterit."

includes all integers from 1 to 16 inclusive. They may have as few as three rows and as many as the constructor desires. There is only one possible square of order three, although rotation and mirroring can produce a total of eight mathematically equivalent variations. For the square of four, there are at least 800 unique squares, and the numbers continue to increase dramatically as the squares get larger. When dealing with a square as large as *DOP*'s Lunar square, of order nine, the number of possibilities is so large as to be difficult to calculate even with modern techniques.[10]

Magic squares show certain consistencies regardless of size, and thus rules may be devised which will always produce *a* magic square, as opposed to *all* magic squares. Arabic mathematicians probably knew some of the vast number of possible rules as early as the seventh century C.E., and the thirteenth-century Byzantine mathematician Manuel Moschopoulos described rules and squares which were almost certainly the chief source (directly or otherwise) for the squares in *DOP*.[11]

The connection between squares of different sizes and the sequence of heavenly bodies apparently dates at least to old Harranian culture, and was certainly common among Arabic thinkers by about the twelfth century. The usual Arabic system moved sequentially *outward* from the earth, such that the moon was assigned the square of three, Mercury the square of four, and so forth, while the system in *DOP* II:22 works the opposite way.[12]

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[10] The mathematical issues of magic squares are discussed well in the chapter, "Magic Squares" of W. W. Rouse Ball and H. S. M. Coxeter, *Mathematical Recreations and Essays,* 13th ed. (New York: Dover, 1987), 193-221.

[11] Paul Tannery, "Traité de Manuel Moschopoulos sur les carrés magiques," in *Sciences exactes chez les Byzantins*, vol. 4 of *Mémoires Scientifiques* , 27-60 (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1920).

[12] On the old Harranian origins, see H.E. Stapleton, "The Antiquity of Alchemy," *Ambix* 5, nos. 1-2 (1953), 1-43; and "Probable sources of the numbers on which Jabirian Alchemy was based," *Archives Internale de l'Institute des Sciences* (UNESCO, 1953). Ahrens has found a system parallel to *DOP*'s in the works of al-Buni (d.1225), but there is little reason to suppose that Agrippa was familiar with this source; Nowotny has found a late fifteenth century text which does indeed present magic squares in the same order as Agrippa, but I cannot agree with him as to the fundamental importance of the work to Agrippa's system. (W. Ahrens, "Studien über die 'magischen Quadrate' des Araber," *Islam*, vii (1916), 186-250; Nowotny, critical notes to *DOP*, 430ff.) The text in question, "De septem quadraturis planetarum," does seem to have been a source for both Agrippa and for Albrecht Dürer's *Melancolia I.* It is interesting to note that every western presentation of the system after Agrippa time has used his correlations of planets with numbers, apart from Girolamo Cardano who most likely re-reversed the system out of a dislike for Agrippa.

Construction of Demonic Sigils

The planetary and demonic marks are apparently entirely original, although the underlying notions may derive from various sources.[13] As II:22 is absent from the Juvenile Draft, and in fact is not even mentioned in the projected table of contents of the 1531 DOP, we have only the 1533 DOP to guide our reading.

The demonic sigils (*signacula*) are derived from the magic squares as written in Hebrew. The method is conceptually quite simple—one merely connects the relevant letters with straight lines—but putting it into practice is rather more difficult. When, as often happens, a letter of the demon's name does not appear in the square, the constructor substitutes the letter which is one-tenth its value in *gematria* numbers; thus, for example, the letter *lamed* (ל=30) is replaced with the letter *gimel* (ג=3). This is based on a system known as *aiq beker* (אוק בכר), also called the nine chambers, most simply represented by the chart (figure 4) which appears in *DOP* III:30. *Gematria* numbers themselves are explained in II:19.

This simple numerological trick solves almost all the various difficulties in the demonic sigils; unfortunately it is not entirely consistently applied. In two instances (*Nachiel*, the Intelligence of the Sun, and *Hagiel*, the Intelligence of Venus), a final *lamed* is replaced with gimel, despite the fact that *lamed* actually appears in the square, perhaps because this makes the sigil look somewhat cleaner. In some cases, a tens digit followed by a ones digit is represented in the sigil by the single position which has both letters, as with the *yod-alef* (יא=11) in *Graphiel*, the Intelligence of Mars. This is most common in the combination *yod-alef*, but there are cases when the two letters are separated. Sometimes such squares contain a double hook, indicating that both letters are represented, but this is also not consistent. Some of the sigils are printed in a rotated position, while others appear precisely as they

ש	ל	ג	ר	כ	ב	ק	י	א
s	l	g	r	k	b	q	i	a
300	30	3	200	20	2	100	10	1
ם	ס	ו	ך	נ	ה	ת	מ	ד
m	s	w	k	n	h	t	m	d
600	60	6	500	50	5	400	40	4
ץ	צ	ט	ף	פ	ח	ן	ע	ז
ẓ	ẓ	t	p	p	ḥ	h	A	z
900	90	9	800	80	8	700	70	7

Figure 4: Nine chambers system

[13] Some of the complex issues relating to possible sources for Agrippa's sigils are dealt with by Nowotny in his 1967 facsimile edition of *DOP*.

would if overlaid on the squares. With a bit of tinkering, however, one can produce all of the sigils from the names and squares given.

It may be useful to walk through one sample construction step by step. Let us consider the sigil of the Demon of Jupiter, *Hismael* (figure 5). The square of Jupiter contains all the numbers from 1 to 16, and is a square of order four. The name is spelled *he-sameḥ-mem-alef-lamed* (הסמאל), numerically equivalent to 5-60-40-1-30, totaling 136. The sum of all the numbers from 1 to 16 is also 136, so that the name *Hismael* "fills up the numbers." Now of the numbers in the name, 60, 40, and 30 do not appear in the square; we thus apply the nine chambers, and translate them to 6 (*waw* ו), 4 (*daleṭ* ד), and 3 (*lamed* ל). Next we draw lines from number to number, moving 5-6-4-1-3. This process produces the sigil given for the demon Hismael.[14]

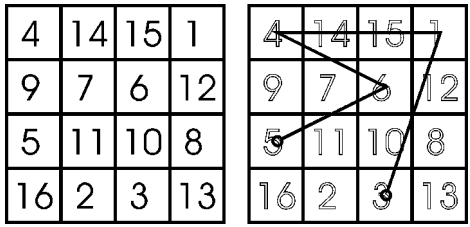

Figure 5: Construction of the *Hismael* sigil

Planetary Characters

The construction of the planetary characters (*characteres*) is considerably more difficult, because it is difficult to see what if any rules have been applied. In fact, the rules are extremely consistent, followed in every instance but one. Their derivation hinges upon the fact that there are thousands of possible magic squares, but that only specific squares produce the demonic sigils in *DOP*. The planetary characters incorporate

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[14] If we compare this method with that of the most impressive academic work on the subject, we find that it is essentially the same, although he is unable to account for all the difficulties of the larger squares: Karl Anton Nowotny, "The Construction of Certain Seals and Characters in the Work of Agrippa of Nettesheim," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949), 46-57. Cazalas's earlier and more problematic version, on the other hand, is extraordinarily complex, and depends on vastly extended squares with linear addition applied along each line of the sigils. The primary objection to this explanation is that its creator is unable to make it work for most of the sigils; indeed, the few which do add up correctly strike me as largely fortuitous. The argument from simplicity further undermines what must be the most inventive and complex solution to the problem: E. Cazalas, "Les sceaux planétaires de C. Agrippa," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 110 (1934), 66-82; and "Le Sceau de la Lune de C. Agrippa," *ibid.* 114 (1936), 93-98. Donald Tyson's treatment of the same subject is essentially equivalent to mine on the subject of the demonic sigils.

construction rules which produce the magic squares given in *DOP*, and are essentially mnemotechnical devices for remembering how to generate the squares.

Since there is only one possible square of three, the character of Saturn is nothing more than the figure made by connecting the numbers 1-2-3, 4-5-6, and 7-8-9 with lines. Any square of order three will produce the proper demonic sigils, although they may be rotated or mirrored (figure 6).

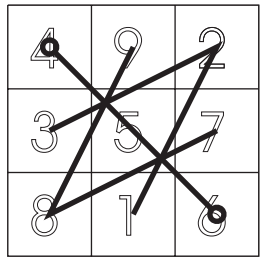

Figure 6 : Character of Saturn

For numbers larger than three, construction rules divide into two groups: those for odd-numbered squares and those for even-numbered squares, of which the latter group is subdivided into doubly-even (divisible by four) and singly-even (divisible by two but not four). We can divide the characters into parallel groups.

Figure 7 shows the characters for Mars (5) and Venus (7) set into their respective grids with the proper magic squares. There are notable formal similarities: an X shape running along the diagonals; a curving hook extending up on the bottom right; curves, circles, or a more complex figure in the three remaining triangular spaces. Taking these as distinct elements, we find a number of significant features. First, the top-left to bottom-right diagonal, plus the curving hook, connects sequential numbers: for the character of Mars, the numbers 11 through 16; for Venus, 22 through 29. Next, the various curves and figures which fill the triangular spaces connect numbers of the same factor of ten; that is, all of the numbers in each set are tens, or forties, or less than ten, etc. The peculiar trident-cross figure at the top of the Venus character thus resolves into a cross and a V-shape, the one connecting forties (41, 42, 49, 48) and the other tens (16, 17, 10). The top-right to bottom-left diagonal seems to be included for symmetry.[15] Finally, the center squares, marked by the crossing-point of the X-shape, contain numbers equal to $(n^2+1)/2$, i.e. the middle of the sequence from 1 to n.[16]

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[15] Although it could be argued that this line connects numbers which increase from $(n+1)/2$ in increments of n with n being the order of the square.

[16] Nowotny explains odd-numbered characters with a complex chessboard method, such that the half-circles and the circle in the Venus character connect squares of the same color. While this solution is intriguing, I fail to see how it could aid a constructor. In addition, the chessboard method does not seem to appear in contemporary sources.

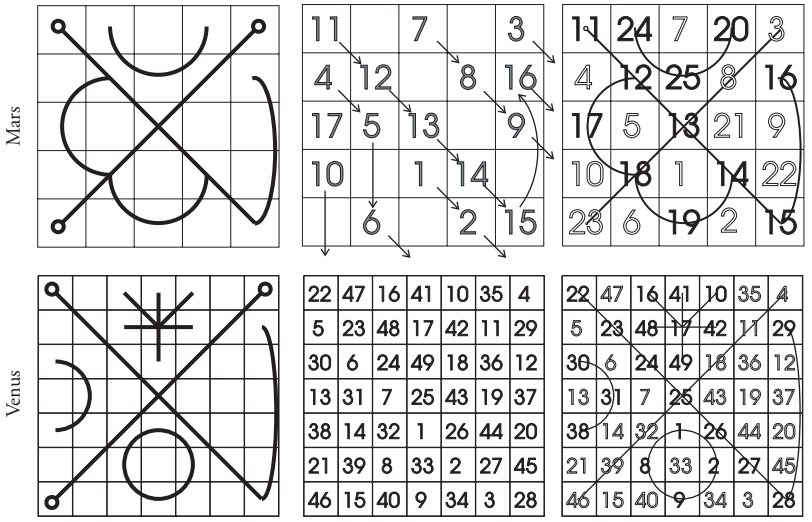

Figure 7: Construction of Mars and Venus characters

These distinctive features of the Venus and Mars characters refer to a construction rule found in Moschopoulos.[17] For any odd-numbered square, place the number 1 in the square just below the center. Number 2 goes in the square immediately down and to the right of 1, and continue counting up in this fashion. When you reach the bottom row, wrap around to the top, and similarly wrap from the rightmost column to the leftmost. When you reach an already filled square, which will happen every *n* squares, move down two spaces, fill in the next number, and continue from there with the down-to-the-right motion as before.

If a hypothetical magus remembers the planetary character but not the rule, the square can be quickly reconstructed, provided that the magus has at some point taken the trouble to work out the correlation. Let us suppose the constructor recalls that the "middle" number falls in the middle of the square, and that the lines have something to do with sequential numbers.[18] Filling in 13 in the center of the square of order five, the sequence 11 through 15 fills in immediately. Following the curved hook, 16 is added. This step alone is sufficient to complete the

[17] Tannery, "Le traité de Manuel Moschopoulos," 38-41.

[18] One could imagine the magus remembering different points; the 'middle number' and sequence are what I found I remembered most quickly after deriving the relationship of the squares and the characters.

square, as it incorporates the rules about wrapping bottom-to-top and right-to-left with the rule of jumping down two squares at the end of a sequence. The constructor now continues marking 17 through 20 and 21 through 25; working backwards from 11, the remaining squares can be filled. Any doubts vanish when the constructor sees that the curves in open quadrants connect numbers of the same tens digit (24-25-20, 12-17-18, 18-19-14).

The Lunar square (order nine) presents some difficulties here. Although the method of constructing the square is the same as for the other odd squares, the character is not in any way indicative of the construction technique. Nowotny suggests that the four shapes merely represent the astrological symbol for the moon, and I think on balance that he must be correct, although it would be more accurate to say that the figures are geomantic, considering that DOP II:51, on geomantic characters, includes a lunar character which looks almost the same as the figures here, and which is apparently derived from the geomantic character "populus."[19]

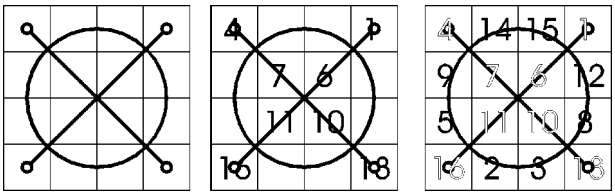

Figure 8: Construction of character for Jupiter

Doubly even squares (four and eight, see figure 8) are constructed according to entirely different rules from odd squares, and again the system used in *DOP* is one presented by Moschopoulos.[20] Quarter each four-by-four square with an X. Next, begin at the top right and count sequentially, moving right to left exactly as Hebrew is written. Each time a square containing a line is encountered, enter the relevant number, and count but do not fill the empty squares. Once this is complete, start over backwards—from left to right and from bottom to top, and fill only empty squares. If we compare this extremely simple construction method with the planetary characters, we find that the connected X-shapes

[19] It is possible to invent rather complicated methods for constructing this square which would to some degree be represented by the character, but it seems unlikely that *DOP* uses an entirely different method to construct this square than for the other odd numbers, especially as the square is mathematically cognate. One can perhaps assume that a reader who has mastered the smaller odd squares would remember the rules.

[20] Tannery, "Le traité de Manuel Moschopoulos," 42-49.

represent spaces filled "forwards," where curves and disconnected lines represent spaces filled during the second "backward" writing sequence. Once again, a constructor who remembers the character but only a vague sense of the rules can quickly fill in the entire square.[21]

The only singly even square here is a square of six, for the Sun (figure 9). This type of square is in some ways the most difficult to construct, and the solar character is a rather clever way of representing the rules graphically, although it would likely require a bit of experimentation for the constructor who remembers very little; the rules for the Sun square are similar to those for doubly-even squares, and may well have been developed by Agrippa himself.[22] Once again, begin by connecting the corners with an X, and fill in the squares so marked on the "forward" pass and the remainder on the "backward" pass. Now consider the four hook-

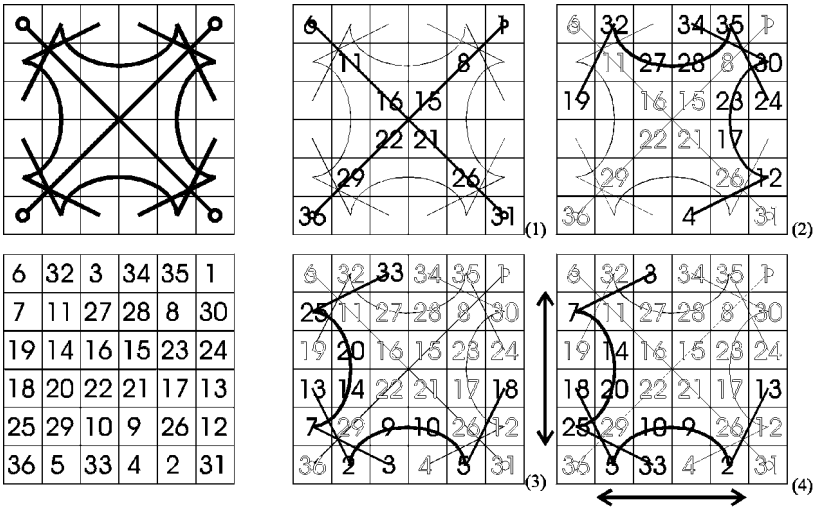

Figure 9: Construction of character of the Sun

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[21] Nowotny's explanation is substantially similar to mine, but uses a rotation of 180° for all the numbers on the circle of the square of four (Jupiter). While this does indeed produce the desired square, it requires considerable reworking for the square of eight (Mercury). The rule in Moschopoulos is very similar to that explained here, although of course Moschopoulos fills in the numbers from left to right.

[22] Although Moschopoulos did present a method for building a square of six, the method and the finished square are nothing at all like the one in *DOP*. The method in *DOP* is in some respects a more elegant solution than that of Moschopoulos. Paul Tannery describes Moschopoulos's method in "Manuel Moschopoulos et Nicolas Rhabdas," in *Sciences exactes chez les Byzantins*, vol. 4 of *Mémoires Scientifiques*, 1-19 (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1920).

ended curves of the solar character: the two which connect in the bottom-left, i.e. in the "backward" corner, must be mirrored on their curved axes to complete the square; this is vaguely suggested by the shape of the curves themselves. So long as the constructor recalls the necessity for some form of mirroring, determining the solution would require relatively few experiments.[23]

Our analysis of the magic squares and their respective sigils and characters has demonstrated, at the least, that the magical figures in *DOP* are in no way random or haphazard. Despite his modern reputation, Agrippa was not simply an encyclopedist who collected odd bits of obscure knowledge and fantasy. On the contrary, *DOP* is the work at once of a careful collector and a surprisingly original redactor. From the scattered collection of possible rules for constructing magic squares, for example, Agrippa carefully selected those that fit a relatively continuous system, and even devised a new rule to fit them better.

If it is clear that the various magical sub-systems in *DOP* are not haphazard, this suggests that there must be some continuity to the whole. That is, rather than asking *whether* there is a method in the madness, we must ask *what* the method is, and what end it serves.

Exemplum: The Practice of Images

The only other practical application of mathematical magic, Book II, chapter 50, "Of certain celestial observations and the practice of some images,"[24] divides readily into three parts. First, a series of images (*imagines*) constructed for specific purposes, both positive and negative, such as producing success for petitions, driving away animal pests, or bringing misery upon one's enemies. The second section contains similar though more complex images which bring true or prophetic dreams, and which involve the names of angels. This second series appears only in the

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[23] Nowotny's analysis of this square is similar, except that the numbers along the hooked curves are generated by a complex set of partial and complete mirrorings. For this as for all the even-numbered squares, however, the system presented here is essentially the same, where Nowotny's solutions are radically different in each case.

[24] *DOP* II:50, 370-73/402-04, De observationibus quibusdam coelestibus et practica quarundam eiusdem imaginum. The entire Latin text of this chapter appears in Appendix I below.

final version of *DOP*, where the first appeared in Book II, chapter 16 of the juvenile draft. Finally, the chapter ends with a short section on the theory of images, also appearing only in the final draft.

It is worth quoting the final, theoretical portion in its entirety:

> But know this, that such images work nothing, unless they be so vivified that either a natural, or celestial, or heroical, or animastical, or demoniacal, or angelical virtue be in them, or assistant to them.
>
> But who can give a soul to an image, or make a stone to live, or metal, or wood, or wax? And who can raise out of stones children unto Abraham? Certainly this arcanum doth not enter into an artist of a stiff neck: neither can he give those things which hath them not. Nobody hath them but he who doth (the elements being restrained, nature being overcome, the heavens being overpowered) transcend the progress of angels, and comes to the very Archetype itself, of which being then made a cooperator may do all things, as we shall speak afterwards.[25]

The Practice of Images

The basic theory of image-construction is simple enough:

> So to make anyone fortunate, we make an image in which these are fortunate, viz. the significator of the life thereof, the givers of life, the signs, and planets. Moreover let the ascendant, the middle of the heaven, and the lords thereof be fortunate: also the place of the Sun, and place of the Moon; Part of Fortune, and lord of conjunction or prevention made before their nativity, by depressing the malignant planets. But if we will make an image to procure misery, we must do contrariwise, and those which we place here fortunate, must there be unfortunate, by raising malignant stars.[26]

In other words, one constructs an image at a time when the stars and planets are in a position favorable to the desired end. Upon the image one inscribes a series of figures which represent the planets and signs in an ideal configuration, along with the names and perhaps the seals of any particularly useful and relevant demons.

> So for gain let there be made an image under the ascendant of the nativity of the man, or under the ascension of that place to which thou wouldst appoint the gain, with a fortunate ascendant; and thou shalt make the lord of the second house, which is in the house of substance to be joined with the

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[25] *DOP* II:50, 373/404.
[26] *DOP* II:50, 370-71/402.

> lord of the ascendant in the trine or sextile, and let there be a reception amongst them; thou shall make fortunate the eleventh and the lord thereof, and the eighth; and if thou canst, put the Part of Fortune in the ascendant, or the second; and let the image be buried in that place, or carried from that place, to which thou wouldst appoint the gain.[27]

The meaning is not entirely clear. In particular, it is difficult to tell which instructions refer to the time when the image is to be made and which to the characters, seals, and names to be inscribed on the image, if any. The instructions which appear only in the final draft are rather more specific:

> And let there be made an image of dreams, which being put under the head of him that sleeps, makes him dream true dreams concerning anything that he hath formerly deliberated of: and let the figure of that be the figure of a man sleeping in the bosom of an angel, which thou shall make in the Lion [Leo] ascending, the Sun keeping the ninth house in Aries; thou shalt write upon the breast of the man the name of the effect desired, and on the head of the angel the name of the intelligence of the Sun. Let the same image be made in Virgo ascending, Mercury being fortunate in Aries in the ninth house, or Gemini ascending in Mercury being fortunate, and keeping the ninth house in Aquarius; and let it be received from Saturn with a fortunate aspect, and let the name of the Spirit of Mercury be writ upon it. Let also the same be made in Libra ascending, Venus being received from Mercury in Gemini in the ninth house, by writing upon it the angel of Venus. . . .[28]

The passage continues with possible ascendants and ninth houses for each planetary angel.

The instructions here are clear enough, and require only a fairly basic understanding of astrology (or a decent textbook) and an ephemerides to put into effect. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile the simplicity of these images' construction with the passage quoted above, which states that only the true magus, having conquered nature and overtopped the heavens, could possibly construct such images.

Suppose, however, that one were to try to follow the directions and construct one of these images. Certain questions immediately arise: What should they be made of? What should the images look like? How large should they be? What are the relevant names to be inscribed? Should

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[27] *DOP* II:50, 371-72/402-03. J.F. mistranslates "partem fortunae" as "part of the fortune;" the term refers to an astrological longitude equal to the longitude of the Ascendant plus that of the Moon minus that of the Sun; in essence, this is the place where the Moon would be if the Sun were rising.

[28] *DOP* II:50, 373/403. J.F. mistranslates "in capite" as "in the hand."

both sides of the image be inscribed, and indeed, should the image be flat or otherwise?

Having worked through both the natural and the mathematical magic, we could come up with possible answers to these questions.[29] More to the point, however, we need to address the more important question: Why these directions? In other words, is it possible to work out why Leo ascending, with the Sun in the ninth house in Aries, combined with the intelligence of the Sun, should have the effect of producing true dreams? For the sake of clear explication, I will walk through the construction and meanings of this single image.

Constructing a Solar Image for Dreams

Let us first select an appropriate time for the operation, a time when Leo is ascendant and the Sun is in Aries. A sign is ascendant when it is rising on the eastern horizon, which lasts for about 30 degrees of the rotation of the earth, or about two hours; consequently Leo will be ascendant for about two hours every day, at which time it is by definition in the first house, placing Aries in the ninth house.[30] The ninth house extends from midheaven to 30 degrees past, approximately equivalent to the two hours from noon to two o'clock.[31] Leo will be ascendant every noon or so for about one month out of every year, generally late July to late August. So we will plan to construct our image a little after noon in early August.[32]

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[29] For example, it will be readily adduced from the discussions of metals in Book I that a Solar image ought to be made in gold, and so forth.

[30] In the passage quoted above, we have "Let the same image be made in Virgo ascending, Mercury being fortunate in Aries in the ninth house." This is an error—if Virgo is ascendant, Taurus will be in the ninth house. Similarly, with Gemini ascendant, Aquarius is in the ninth house, and so forth.

[31] The term "midheaven" refers to the point at which the celestial meridian intercepts the ecliptic and thus is not exactly equivalent to the point directly overhead, so that the hours from noon to two are only approximately the ninth house; actually it ought to be from noon to 1:51'37". It is unclear whether it is best to use solar time or sidereal time, although the issue is discussed in a rather opaque section of II:34, 350-51/371.

[32] The calculation would be more difficult for any of the other versions of this image, because the ruling planet is not the sun; consequently an ephemerides would need to be consulted as to when the proper planet would be in the ninth house with the desired ascendant sign. For all technical astrological information I have consulted John Filbey and Peter Filbey, *The Astrologer's Companion* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, UK: Aquarian Press, 1986); and Alan Leo, *Casting the Horoscope*, vol. 2 of *Astrology for All* (London: L. N. Fowler & Co., 1969).

In Book II, chapter 32, we learn that the sun "doth by its light drive away all the darkness of the night,"[33] and "the Platonists [*Academici*] have nothing to hold forth the Divine Essence more manifestly by, than [the sun]."[34] Thus the sun is a useful planet "to drive away vain dreams"[35] and, by inference, produce true ones.

The sun rules the sign Leo, as noted in II:36, and thus magicians "made also the image of a lion against melancholy phantasies, the dropsy, plague, fevers, and to expel diseases, at the hour of the Sun, the first degree of Leo ascending. . . ."[36] In addition, Leo and Aries are both of the fiery triplicity, ruled by Mars and the Sun, and associated with light, mind, intellect, sight, and related ideas, as noted in the scale of the number four.[37]

The first and ninth houses are trine, which is to say situated 120 degrees apart. In general, "a conjunction [0° apart], or a trine, or sextile [60°] aspect are of friendship," but "all planets are afraid of the conjunction of the Sun, rejoicing in the trine, and sextile aspect thereof."[38] Consequently the Sun in Leo might frighten the lion, but the same planet in Aries, trine to Leo, is fortunate for the operation.

Now we construct the image itself. The shape and size are not specified, but we may infer that the image should be relatively small, and perhaps flat, so that it can easily fit under a sleeper's pillow. On the image we engrave a figure, that is a picture of some kind, of a man sleeping "in the bosom of an angel." A quick glance at the various surviving talismanic images suggests that this need not be elaborate, perhaps a simple line-drawing, executed to the best of the magician's ability.[39]

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[33] *DOP* II:32, 346/365: ". . . et sicut ipse suo lumine fugat tenebras noctis. . . ."

[34] *DOP* II:32, 345/365: ". . . ut non habeant Academici aliqui per quod divinam essentiam espressius monstrare possint."

[35] *DOP* II:41, 360/386: ". . . somnia vana pellere. . . ."

[36] *DOP* II:36, 353/375: "Faciebant quoque leonis imaginem contra phantasmata melancholica, hydropisim, pestem, febres et ad expellendum morbos hora Solis, primo gradu faciei secundae Leonis ascendante. . . ."

[37] *DOP* II:7, 263-68/254-59.

[38] *DOP* II:29, 342/357: ". . . coitus vero et trinus atque sextilis aspectus sunt amicitiae. . . . Solis vero coniunctionem omnes planetae timent, aspectu gaudent trino et sextili."

[39] In *Steganographia* 3.1 on Orifiel, the angel of Saturn, Trithemius remarks on the aesthetics of images: "And note that it is not necessary that the images be made works of art or that great care be expended on them. However simple they be, it matters not, provided they have a general likeness enabling them to be recognised as images of men. If one wish to make them works of art and if he be able to do so, nothing will prevent, *and yet no good is done*" (emphasis mine). Although scholarship on *Steganographia* 3 is rather vexed, a reading of this passage in an Agrippan context suggests that Trithemius may agree in principle with his one-time student on the aesthetic properties of images. As we saw in

The tricky part comes when we are told to "write upon the breast of the man the name of the effect desired, and on the head of the angel the name of the intelligence of the Sun." The name of the effect desired might certainly be "imago somniorum," image of dreams, but there are other possible answers, and the text is not clear on this point.

The name of the "intelligence of the Sun" is more problematic. It might well be *Nachiel* (נביאל), which we saw in the previous exemplum as the intelligence of the Sun. At the same time, it is possible that any of the many other Hebrew (or Hebraic-seeming) names found in other chapters might serve. In addition, the magic squares, not mentioned here, suggest a connection between these names and the squares, such that the ideal way of "writing the name" of one of those demons would be to reproduce the demon's sigil rather than its name as such.

Given the context, where this dream-image has been added only in the final draft of 1533, at more or less the same time as the magic squares of II:22, I will suggest a possible (though unprovable) solution. On one side of the image, which is a flat talisman of gold, we inscribe the character of the Sun; on the other side, we draw the figure in question, with the sigil of *Nachiel* inscribed on the angel's head. As to the name of the effect, I cannot suggest anything specific, although it seems not unreasonable that a well-educated magus might find an apposite biblical citation and extract the name.[40]

The practice of images confirms our previous understanding of the magic squares and sigils, i.e. that the magical figures in *DOP* are not random or haphazard. In addition, it has become increasingly clear that the practical application of any system in *DOP* requires extensive knowledge of all parts of the text. It is impossible to pick up the book and use it, cookbook-fashion, to summon demons or prophetic dreams.

I suggest that this difficulty of use, this "user-unfriendliness," is a deliberate strategy. By shrouding even apparently practical chapters in a

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the previous chapter, Agrippa placed the aesthetic aspect of *vis imaginum* out of the natural realm; given that Trithemius does not consider any strictly demonic magic licit, this passage may indicate his avoidance of the problem: he believes that the aesthetic power of images is irrelevant. *The Steganographia of Johannes Trithemius*, trans. Fiona Tait, Christopher Upton, and Dr. Walden, ed. Adam McLean (Edinburgh: Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourcebooks, 1982).

[40] One might use a portion of Genesis 41, in which Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream. Techniques for Kabbalistic extraction of names from Scripture passages are found in *DOP* III:25 *et passim.* See chapter 4, page 186 below.

veil of oblique and at times misleading references and details, *DOP* defends the secrets of magic from the prying eyes of the dilettante.[41]

DOP also hides a complex theory of language and signification, which undergirds both the magic squares and the practice of images. Without understanding that theory, we cannot progress further. While we might be able to construct images, it is not clear why they are supposed to work; indeed, it is not clear *whether* they will work without our knowing why.

Theories of Signification

Up to now we have seen only a few specific applications of magical theory in celestial magic. In order to extrapolate *DOP*'s more general theory of the power of signs, which remains largely implicit in the text, we must examine briefly some other theoretical approaches to these issues.

DOP uses a great many sources, as we have seen before, and Book II is if anything less explicit about its references than Book I. Of the most important sources, Al-Kindi's *De radiis* [On rays] is not well known now, but was critical for the development of magical theories of influence, so I will summarize the text at some length. I will not discuss Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* and *De arte cabalistica*, or the infamous *Picatrix*, because their contents are quite well known and discussed in many secondary sources;[42] portions of Pico's *900 Conclusions* will be discussed in the next chapter. For clarity's sake, I will also discuss some issues related to writing which arise in modern semiotics and linguistic philosophy.

Al-Kindi: the Theory of Images

De radiis [On rays] is a Latin translation of a work by al-Kindi (Abû Yûsuf Yaqûb b. Ishaq al-Kindi), an Arabic philosopher of the ninth century, to whom Ibn al-Nadim's *Fihrist* [Catalog, c. 1500] attributes more than 270 works, few now extant. Al-Kindi, a distinguished philosopher with a wide range of interests, had a significant role in the Arabic revival of Greek

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[41] We will return to the problem of secrecy at greater length in chapter 4, page 172 below.

[42] For sources on *Picatrix*, see the extensive notes and introductory matter of David Pingree, ed., *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghāyat Al-Ḥakīm* (London: Warburg Institute, 1986).

learning which occurred under the Abbassid dynasty. He died in Baghdad around 873 (A.H. 260) at the age of eighty or so.[43]

The original Arabic of *De radiis* is not extant. The Latin translation, which dates from the twelfth century, is probably at least similar to the Arabic original, but it is possible that the work is entirely spurious. In its Latin form, however, the work was well known to such figures as Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus, and is referred to (at least implicitly) by Ficino, Pico, Zorzi, and Agrippa himself.[44]

De radiis is an entirely theoretical work, dealing with abstract principles of magic. In brief, it argues that all things are interconnected by "rays," like invisible beams of light, which can only be perceived by their effects. Every celestial object projects these rays, which then strike every other object in the "machine of the world" and produce effects dependent upon the star which emits them, the location of the receiving object, the strength of correspondence between emitter and receptor, and the other rays which strike the same receptor. For example, Mars emits rays which (among other things) promote warlike or aggressive qualities; these rays strike all objects, which thus incline more or less strongly to such qualities. An object's location may place it directly under the influence of Mars, such that the rays strike quite directly; if the location places the object at a greater or lesser angle of incidence to the rays, they strike with more or less effect. Some objects, by virtue of form, substance, accidents, and so forth, are particularly receptive to Martian rays, as for example objects made of iron, brass, or sulphur, or warlike animals and people. These receptors are more strongly affected by Martian rays than those which fall under other stars, as silver under the Moon, or melancholic people under Saturn.

Every object of the material world also produces rays, which are in a sense refractions or aggregates of the celestial rays. Thus a piece of silver tends mainly to project lunar rays, but it will also project Martian rays in proportion to the position of Mars in the sky and the other characteristics of the silver object (such as being inscribed with a figure of Mars).

What we think of as sensible perception is our reception of the totality of all these rays. In other words, if I perceive a candle, I am in fact

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[43] My information on al-Kindi and the Arabic text comes from Sylvain Matton, ed. *La magie Arabe traditionelle* (Paris: Bibliotheca Hermetica, 1977), 73-75 *et passim.* This anthology includes a complete French translation of *De radiis*, which has been my main textual source; all citations are to this edition.

[44] See, for example, Pico's conclusion 5>45 (Farmer, 453), which mentions al-Kindi (see page 156n.23 below for an explanation of references to this text).

perceiving a vast number of rays which the candle is projecting; these rays reflect the form, substance, accidents, influences, and every other possible quality and characteristic of the candle. Indeed, what I *really* perceive is not the candle at all, but the image which these rays induce in my mind.

Since humans are a microcosm of the universe, the image so produced is similarly microcosmic; it is in every way a perfect replica, and an entirely real (but not at all material) object. If I grasp this image firmly in my mind, I can affect it by force of will, and produce a parallel effect upon the physical object which projected the image. Thus I can light the candle simply by adding to the mental image the additional characteristics and qualities of a candle-flame, such as heat, light, smoky smell, etc.

The only difficulties in lighting a candle in this fashion are (1) the revised image must be nearly perfect, and (2) the magician must will it to happen very strongly. Al-Kindi is not absolutely clear on how to go about this; apparently mental training of some sort is necessary, and the magician generally supplements the magical action with additional acts, such as speaking words, playing music, making gestures, and so forth. These additional acts produce their own rays, and if properly chosen, add to the force of the magician's will, ensuring that the candle does indeed light.

Physical images, discussed near the end of the work, are supplementary objects acting in much the same ways as supplementary actions. The magician constructs an image of or related to the object which he ultimately wishes to affect, or to the effect which he wishes to produce. This image should be connected to the object by strong resemblances and correlations, i.e. by a great many powerful rays. Thus the image should be constructed at an astrologically appropriate time and place, of an appropriate material, in an appropriate shape, inscribed with appropriate figures, words, etc. The construction of the image, in fact, is described in the same manner as the fundamental magical procedure of will, in that image-construction depends on an act of will, with the magician strongly desiring or willing that the image act in the desired fashion, as an ideal reflection of the object or effect in question.

Before moving on, a few points should be noted. First, it is not entirely clear how the supplemental actions support the central act of will. Given *DOP*'s theory of the mind and the fantasy discussed in the previous chapter, I think these supplementary actions are supposed to function in two ways: (1) they produce rays which tend to encourage the desired effect upon the object, for example reflecting solar rays to encourage fire on a candle; and (2) these same rays produce similar effects on the *mental image*

of the object, acting through the fantasy to bolster the magician's will and improve the clarity or perfection of the altered image.

Second, al-Kindi makes clear that rays are bi-directional, although they seem to have a dominant direction. In effect, they establish conduits for power between any two objects, and a magician can send power from receptor to emitter. The importance of supplemental actions seems to imply that this is more difficult than simply encouraging the effect of already-present rays. For example, a lead talisman of Saturn is connected both with Saturn and with the person who wears it. Because the rays move downward from the celestial sphere to the talisman and thence to the wearer, it is easier to strengthen the effect of the talisman on the wearer than it is to use the person to affect the talisman, and it is easier to strengthen the effect of Saturn on the talisman than it is to use the talisman to affect Saturn itself (which last would appear, in *De radiis*, to be nearly impossible, although perhaps not absolutely so).

Third, although al-Kindi stresses the importance of words as the most critical form of supplementary magical actions, devoting more than a third of *De radiis* to "the power of words," [45] very little of his language-theory appears to have been picked up in *DOP*. We will see later that there are some interesting intersections, but *DOP*'s theory of language breaks quite sharply from Al-Kindi.

The Semiotics of Writing

For the most part, semioticians and linguists have denigrated writing as irrelevant to the "universals" of language.[46] For Roman Jakobson, "to preach the mere coexistence of the phonological and graphic systems while denying the primary, fundamental nature of the former would be a misleading distortion of the actual linguistic stratification,"[47] and he stresses that "in the relation between graphic and phonological entities, the

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[45] *De radiis*, 100-118.

[46] On the linguistic status of writing, see the many stimulating essays in Josef Vachek, *Written Language Revisited* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1989), which are particularly useful as critical summaries of linguistic work; for a more anthropological approach, see Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[47] Roman Jakobson, "Retrospect," in *Selected Writings, Volume I* (The Hague, 1962), 653ff; quoted in Vachek, "On the Linguistic Status of Written Utterances," in *Written Language*, 18.

former always functions as a *signans* and the latter as a *signatum*."[48] Similarly, C.F. Hockett argues that "the channel for all linguistic communication is vocal-auditory," which necessarily "excludes written language from the category 'human language.'"[49]

On the other hand, the evidence adduced for this denigration of written language is almost immediately suspect. Most of the arguments have been speciously historical, even evolutionary: it is the fact that writing emerges historically later than speech which denies writing the status of a language universal.[50] As Jacques Derrida and others have noted, the criticism of written language is at heart a moral one. Saussure's dictum that "Writing veils the appearance of language; it is not a guise for language but a disguise," his claim that "the spoken word is so intimately bound to its written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role,"[51] make clear his demonization of writing, which he attempts to veil with false historicism.

Nevertheless, Josef Vachek and a few other linguists have studied writing as a distinct form of language. Their conclusions are surprising: some argue that written language constitutes an almost entirely separate mode of language from speech, having its own *langue* and *parole*; to use functionalist terminology, there are both spoken and written *norms*. In the context of these norms (or *langues*), Fred Householder has even made the suggestion that in logical terms, *written language is prior to spoken*.[52]

In its barest form, the argument is that, in communities which have a written as well as a spoken norm of language, the written rapidly attains considerable social status—literacy becomes a marker of the elite. When speech is used in such a community, Householder argues, the listener refers to the written norm to ensure clear understanding, a referential process unnecessary with written text. For example, "eye" and "I" are pronounced identically, requiring the listener to refer to a broader norm

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[48] Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences," *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 455.

[49] C. F. Hockett, "The Problem of Universals in Language," in J. Greenberg, ed. *Universals in Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 7; Vachek, "On the Linguistic Status," 18-19.

[50] Vachek, "On the Linguistic Status," 19.

[51] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1916), 51 and 45; cited in Derrida, *Grammatology*, 31, 36 *et passim*.

[52] Fred W. Householder, *Linguistic Speculations* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 224-64; cited in Vachek, *Written Language*, 26ff.

for comprehension; in a written text, on the other hand, there is no possibility of misunderstanding the one for the other. Jacques Derrida has made this point with his neologism *différance*, pronounced the same as *différence* but which, in its written form, suggests a participial, active sense of both differing and deferring.[53]

In some systems, such as Chinese, there is no direct phonetic component of the written characters; despite this, the referential process which Householder describes occurs in Chinese as well. The most common example is names: when a speaker gives a name, each syllable is commonly repeated with a two- or three-character phrase which identifies the character's meaning. This would translate something like, "Householder. House, as in dwelling. Holder, as in one who owns." Thus the spoken norm can be said to depend upon the written norm.

Because of the lack of a fixed order of graphemes, Chinese characters are not strongly sequenced as are the letters of the alphabet. Despite this, they can be looked up in a dictionary. In the most common system, each character is broken down visually, such that a portion can be read as a special sub-character, or *radical*. The radicals have a more or less set sequence, based upon the number of brush-strokes necessary to write them. Having found the radical in the index, one consults the sub-section of characters with the same number of additional brush-strokes as the character sought. This provides a manageable list of characters.

In Chinese, then, graphemes are commonly categorized by the way they are produced, with no reference whatever to a phonetic scheme. Beyond this, it is important to note that the relation between a Chinese character and its meaning is utterly arbitrary, except in a very few cases of extremely ancient characters which derive from pictographs of the things represented. Reading Chinese characters, then, depends on a number of systems (stroke-order, radicals, rote memorization, ideographic representation) which have no connection to the spoken language, as powerfully evidenced by the near-universality of the Chinese written language as compared to the many mutually incomprehensible spoken dialects.

Vachek notes two distinctive features of writing which are of particular relevance to an analysis of magical figures: first, the difference in temporal

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[53] Incidentally, this suggests that *différance* should be pronounced like the English "difference" when speaking English, limiting the distinction to the textual. The usual pronunciation, like the French *différence*, obscures a large part of the value of the neologism, thereby transforming it into merely another piece of mystifying jargon.

control of the utterance; second, the sequential and even ordinal nature of written characters within many writing systems. To the latter I would append the visual divisibility of the grapheme which as we have seen can supplement or substitute for sequentiality.

(1) Temporal control: A listener is jailed by the speaker, locked into the speaker's delivery. The speaker controls the temporal extension of the utterance, and the listener cannot skip back and forth. In written language, however, it is the reader who holds the whip hand, providing of course that this reader has already attained sufficient mastery of the graphic system. In terms of ideology and control, an orator dominates the situation, in that the listener has very limited options: he may surrender control and wait for an opportunity to speak; he may refuse to listen and thereby surrender his opportunity to respond; or he may attempt to wrest control from the speaker by interrupting, heckling, or even responding when he has not actually listened.

The reader's control of the situation is far greater: she may read the text in the order prescribed by the norm of the system (for example left to right, word by word, and on sequentially through the work); she may glance through rapidly, attempting only to get the gist of the text; she may dip into the work, reading portions which interest her whenever she chooses; she may even read transgressively, refusing to follow the norm (reading an English book from back to front or right to left, for example). On the other hand, she may not respond directly to the writer, as can a listener to a speaker, although she may write marginalia or even a lengthy text in response: the conversational model does not hold in writing.

(2) Ordering: Many written systems order graphemes in a fixed sequence: *abc*, *alpha-beta-gamma*, etc. In some instances, this sequence may serve an ordering function, acting as an assistant to readers. Indexes are commonly ordered alphabetically, although as Michel Foucault has noted there is no "natural" reason to do so.[54] In *gematria*, as we have seen, the sequence of letters is used to denote numbers: *alef*=1, *bet*=2, etc.

(3) Divisibility: Chinese characters and their systematization may serve as an example of the *visual divisibility* of written signs: characters break down into at least two portions for purposes of a dictionary index. Although most alphabetic systems do not fit this model, the phenomenon of spelling can in a sense serve the same function. Not only can words be

[54] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), *passim*.

thus sequenced (e.g alphabetically), but they can also be subdivided into individual letters, as in a crossword puzzle, an acrostic, or Scrabble.

With all these characteristics of written signs—reader dominance, sequencing, visual divisibility—the crucial point is that they have no real parallels in the spoken medium. One can, of course, subdivide spoken words into syllables and pronounce them sequentially or in a random order, but the parallel is weak, as well as extremely rare.

One apparent counter-example would be Brahminical training in ancient Sanskrit texts. As is well known, these "texts" are memorized and passed down orally, keeping intact not only every word of the corpus but also every syllabic emphasis and accent. A famous test of a Brahmin's knowledge requires him to recite a portion syllable by syllable backwards, or even in alternating syllables—first, last, second, second-to-last, etc., until the recitation converges in the middle. It would seem, on the face of it, that the survival of the Vedic corpus attests to the existence and importance of the arbitrary divisibility of spoken language, even if there are few known examples.

At the same time, it has been argued that the existence of such memorization, known as Lengthy Verbatim Recall in psycholinguistics, is precisely evidence of a *written* norm. Parry's and Lord's famous works on epic recitations suggest that in non-literary cultures, the concept of rote memorization is absent. Similarly, it seems that the origins of the Brahminic memorization tradition are precisely contemporary with the advent of a written system in ancient South Asia. Indeed, one might argue that this priestly tradition defends against writing by constructing a kind of mental or mnemotechnical writing. Like the *ars memorativa*, such a system depends on the user's ability to situate syllables or words in imagined *space*, rather than in *time* as is usual for speech.[55]

Thus if writing is considered on its own terms, rather than as a derivative of speech, it has (at least) the following characteristics: (1) interpretive control by the recipient rather than the producer; (2) arbitrary

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[55] On "lengthy verbatim recall" and epic recitation, see I.M.L. Hunter, "Lengthy Verbatim Recall: The Role of Text," in A. Ellis, ed. *Progress in the Psychology of Language*, vol. 1 (London: Erlbaum Assoc., 1985), also Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 167-90, 234-36, 290-300, *et passim*; on *ars memorativa* see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London & Chicago: Routledge & Kegan Paul and University of Chicago Press, 1966), also Marie-Luce Demonet, *Les voix du signe*, 200-205 *et passim*.

divisibility; (3) spatial rather than temporal extension. In many cases, the written signs are also sequenced according to an arbitrarily chosen system.

Writing, according to this definition, includes not only all the systems normally so called, but also the majority of mnemotechnical systems. Most interestingly for our purposes, it also includes a great many divinatory systems, even among communities normally considered non-literate. For example, the Yoruba divination system (*Ifa*) requires diviners to construct a four-by-two grid, where each of the eight elements is determined by the random fall of palm nuts. This process produces one of 256 figures, which are then interpreted. Jonathan Z. Smith argues that such techniques produce texts read according to "canons" of interpretation.[56] Although Smith's focus is on interpretive canons, the literary connotations of the term "canon" apply equally to the figures or texts produced by such divinations. It is hardly surprising to find such metaphors as "reading" the stars, "reading" Tarot cards, and so forth.[57]

The Elementary Forms of Language

We have wandered some way from the contents of *DOP*, unraveling some sources and theories upon which it draws and to which it can be paralleled; now we can reconnect these theories with the practices described in the exempla: the sigils and characters of the magic squares, and the practice of images for dreams. In doing so, it will become clear that *DOP* has its own consistent and coherent theory of language and signification. In brief, Book II describes the bases, theories, and practice of a transcendent written language which inscribes and impresses life upon a lifeless medium. In

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[56] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36-52. See also William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1969) for a detailed analysis of *Ifa*, which is strikingly similar to Agrippa's geomancy (see page 130). There may be historical reasons for this similarity, as *Ifa* seems to have influenced and been influenced by the Arabic practice of "sand-cutting" (see Bascom, 3-12). Burton noted the similarities, and connected *Ifa* (or rather Dahomean *Fa*) with the "geomancy of the Greeks, much cultivated by the Arabs under the name of Al-Raml, 'The sand'. . . . 'Napoleon's Book of Fate' is a notable specimen of European and modern vulgarization." Sir Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey*, 2 vols. (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1864; reprint, 1893), 1:222; quoted in Bascom, 8.

[57] I shall return to the issue of divination as reading in the context of ritual theory (page 171 below).

order to clarify this practice, it is simplest to divide *DOP*'s approach to language into two portions: elementary units and theories of signification.

Number and Harmony

As was made clear in the previous chapter, Book I argues that nature and logos rests upon an elemental foundation. Similarly, Book II argues that celestial language rests upon a numerical foundation.

Numbers in *DOP* do not merely count, but represent. Because there are seven planetary bodies, for example, the number seven can represent the planets.[58] This is equally true with the ordinal aspect of numbers—since Saturn resides in the third sphere (counting downwards from heaven), the number three can represent Saturn. The argument is implicit in the parallel between the natural elements in Book I and the numbers in Book II. In nature, for instance, fire is linked to heat by a two-way semiosis, such that heat implies fire and fire implies heat. Similarly, numbers imply what they count or order, and vice-versa.

Like the elements, also, numbers can be joined together to construct complex objects or signs which similarly act by a referential process through the more basic numbers.

> Again, all things that are, and are made, subsist by, and receive their virtue from numbers. For time consists of number, and all motion, and action, and all things which are subject to time, and motion. Harmony also, and voices have their power by, and consist of numbers, and their proportions, and the proportions arising from numbers, do by lines, and points, make characters, and figures: <and these are proper to magical operations, the middle which is betwixt both being appropriated by declining to the extremes, as in the use of letters.>[59]

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[58] *DOP* II:10, 272-82/268-75, De septenario et eius scala, discusses the number seven in great detail. Of all the chapters discussing a single number, this is the most detailed and comprehensive. At the same time, it is little more than an extensive list of important things which come in sevens. The importance of these chapters for the current argument is simply that the number and the things numbered are translatable; that is, seven can stand in for the planets, and all septenaries are innately parallel.

[59] *DOP* II:2, 252/237: "Rursus omnia quae sunt atque fiunt certis numero, omnisque motus et actio et omnia quaecunque tempori et motui subiecta sunt; concentus etiam atque voces per numeros eorumque proportionem vim habent atque constant proportionesque, ex numeris ortae, per lineas et puncta constituunt characteres et figuras. <Et hi sunt proprii operibus magicis, medio existente inter utrosque appropriato per declinationem ad extrema, ut in usu literarum." Note that the passage marked with angle braces has been inserted for the 1533 edition, and does not appear in W; the original passage appeared in

As in Jakobson's theory that written language signifies by reference to spoken language, these complex signs signify by reference to numbers. In addition, the interaction of numbers in such signs is determined by relationships of harmony and proportion, which parallel the chemical interactions of the elements. These harmonies and proportions are geometrical and mathematical, but they are also concretely realized in the celestial world in such structures as the proportions of the human body (as *imago Dei*) and of the stars. Even more complex are *semes* which derive from human proportions, celestial positions (e.g. constellations), or pure geometry. Such complicated signs thus signify by a long chain of reference, from human proportion (for example), to basic harmony and proportion, and thus to simple formal numbers.

Figure and Image

> This is to be observed, whatsoever wonderful thing figures work when we write them in papers, plates, or images, they do not do it but by the virtue acquired from sublimer figures, by a certain affection which natural aptitude or resemblance procures, in as much as they are exactly configured to them, as from an opposite wall the echo is caused, and in a hollow glass the collection of the solary rays, which afterward reflecting upon an opposite body, either wood, or any combustible thing, doth forthwith burn it: or as an harp causeth a resounding in another harp, which is no otherwise but because a suitable and like figure is set before it . . . Similarly the figures of which we have spoken, and whatever characters, conceive the virtues of the celestial figures according as they have been opportunely impressed upon things or ritually constructed for the ruling figures, such that one figure is of affinity with, and doth express the other.[60]

This long paragraph is one of the very few explicit statements about the theory of figures in *DOP*, and requires our attention. The remark about

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W II:17. The inserted passage is one of many which suggest an increasing focus by Agrippa on the power and importance of written language.

[60] *DOP*II:23, 320-21/330-31. J. F. misreads "concipiunt" as *concerns*, where it is more accurately *conceives*, as indicated here. Probably because of this misreading, he also confuses much of the latter half of the sentence, which I have re-translated from the Latin. Note also that the phrase "and whatever characters" has been inserted only in the 1533 edition, and is here punctuated as an independent clause. The original sentence reads: "Similiter et figurae de quibus diximus <atque characteres quicunque> concipiunt virtutes figurarum coelestium, quatenus dominantibus illis opportune fuerint rebus impressae aut rite fabricatae, tanquam conspiret figura ad consimilem figuram atque exigat."

the harp is a standard of natural-magical literature, quoted and re-quoted from Pliny.[61] Here, the harp, like the concave mirror, is used to demonstrate what is essentially al-Kindi's theory of images: two fundamentally identical objects are necessarily linked by rays, which can be sufficiently strong to have physical effects if the two objects are close together. The analogy proceeds stepwise, with visible solar rays in the case of the mirror, and invisible rays (or sound-waves) in that of the harp. Adding these two together produces the theory of celestial images.

When the construction of a magical image is done correctly, "one figure is of affinity with, and doth express the other" from which it is made. This is a crucial phrase, and it is typical of *DOP* that it should be hidden in the middle of a largely unremarkable chapter. There is a distinction here: on the one hand, the constructed figure *is of affinity with*, i.e. has an occult connection to, the celestial figure from which it is derived; on the other, the constructed figure *expresses* the celestial one. In a linguistic or semiotic context, the implication is that the constructed figure refers to the celestial in two different ways, by resemblance (iconicity) and by convention (symbolism). That is, the constructed figure is like the word "cat," expressing the notion *cat* within a given (arbitrary) symbol system, and it is simultaneously an image, depicting the animal by an iconic affinity.

Both types of reference here also have an indexical power, to which we shall return. For the current discussion of figures, however, there are three important points for *DOP*'s system. First, resemblance or affinity is not equivalent to expressive meaning. Second, these two modes of reference can be *added*, that is, both can be present in any given sign. Third, the ray-connections between natural and celestial objects (mirror and sun) are not dissimilar to those between natural objects (two harps), except that, as with al-Kindi, the dominant direction of celestial rays is downward (sun affects mirror), where natural rays seem entirely bi-directional (any harp affects any harp).

Character and Hieroglyph

DOP does not explicitly discuss hieroglyphs in much detail, which is rather a pity, as the issue was of considerable importance in magical and

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[61] The citation here appears to be from Ficino, *De vita libri tres*, 3:17. See Compagni, note to *DOP* 320, line 14 - 321, line 3.

linguistic speculations during the Renaissance. The most extended remark on the subject is as follows:

> Therefore the religious volumes of the Egyptians and those belonging to the secrets of their ceremonies, were made of consecrated paper; in these they did write down letters which might not be easily known, which they call holy. *Macrobius, Marcellinus* and others say, they were called hieroglyphs, lest perchance the writings of this kind should be known to the profane, which also *Apuleius* testifies in these words, saying, "The sacrifice being ended, from a secret retired closet he bringeth forth certain books noted with obscure letters, affording compendious words of the conceived speech, partly by the figures of beasts of this kind, partly by figures full of knots, and crooked in manner of a wheel and set thick, twining about like vine tendrils, the reading thereby being defended from the curiosity of the profane."[62]

A similar (though shorter) remark appears in III:29, and in II:23 there is a passing remark on the *ankh*, "reckoned by the Egyptian priests, from the beginning of religion amongst sacred letters, signifying amongst them allegorically the life of future salvation."[63]

DOP here accepts the two stock Renaissance interpretations of hieroglyphs. First, they were secret, priestly writing, as originally suggested by Plutarch and Herodotus; second, they relate allegorically to their meanings, a notion strongly confirmed by Horapollo.

Of course, neither is actually true of Egyptian hieroglyphs, but it must be recalled that the Rosetta stone was not found until 1799, and Renaissance thinkers were extremely unlikely actually to decipher the ancient Egyptian language in any case. What is of greater interest and importance here is the magical and allegorical conception of hieroglyphs, and how that fits into a notion of written language more generally.

This twofold theory, based on secrecy and allegory, depends on a peculiar notion of interpretation. The idea is that a hieroglyph is perfectly transparent and extremely dense. That is, a single sign may represent a quite complex idea. Horapollo gives the famous example of the *ouroboros*:

> 2. THE UNIVERSE. When they wish to depict the Universe, they draw a serpent devouring its own tail, marked with variegated scales. By the scales they suggest the stars in the heavens. This beast is the heaviest of animals, as the earth is heaviest [of elements]. It is the smoothest, like

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[62] *DOP* III:2, 404/443.
[63] *DOP* II:23, 320/330.

> water. And, as each year it sheds its skin, it [represents] old age. But as each season of the year returns successively, it grows young again. But the fact that it uses its own body for food signifies that whatever things are generated in the world by Divine Providence are received back into it by [a gradual process of] diminution.[64]

In theory, a priest, immensely well educated about all things sacred, would simply look at this hieroglyph and understand at once the complex notion of the universe. Even if he did not already know the glyph, he could derive its meaning from knowledge of allegorical interpretation, animals, divinity, and so forth. A layperson, however, could not make such a leap of interpretation, not having the foundation knowledge required.

In the context of *DOP*, it is worth noting that all the information about elements, animals, and so on, that is all the prerequisite knowledge for interpreting the hieroglyph, is contained in Book I. In effect, the "secrecy" of the priestly script can be read as a knowledge of natural magic. When Book I has been mastered and transcended, the magus is no longer one of the "profane" from whom the sacred books must be preserved.

Although hieroglyphs are usually thought of as pictures of animals and the like, we can see this hermeneutic theory in the workings of the sigils of the magic squares. Without considerable prior knowledge—of *gematria*, demonic names, planetary influences, magic squares, mnemotechnics—it is impossible to interpret the figures. With that knowledge, it is clear that the sigils are extremely condensed, multilayered signs.

The issue of hieroglyphs in the Renaissance has been discussed in a number of recent works, and need not be analyzed at length here.[65] With respect to *DOP*'s theory of language in general, however, it is critical to recognize precisely why Renaissance thinkers were wrong: they assumed that Egyptian writing could not be based upon Egyptian spoken language. This has most commonly been discussed as the prime reason that Egyptian could not have been deciphered in the Renaissance. If the equation is in

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[64] Horapollo, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo* , trans. George Boas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 43.

[65] See, most interestingly, Madeleine V.-David, *Le débat sur les écritures et l'hiéroglyphe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles, et l'application de la notion de déchiffrement aux écritures mortes* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1965); also Demonet, *Les voix du signe*, 189-99 *et passim*. Very valuable also is Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and Its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Mythos (Princeton UP), 1993). Chapter I ("Through Renaissance Eyes," 11-42) of Maurice Pope's *The Story of Decipherment: From Egyptian hieroglyphic to Linear B* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975) is a worthwhile summary, although rather positivistic.

a sense reversed, however, the interesting point is simply that Renaissance thinkers made the mistake of believing the Egyptians to be wiser than they.

In essence, the magical conception of hieroglyphs, as seen in the exempla of the magic square sigils and the practice of images, was of a kind of writing which did not require speech. In the journey from sign to meaning, no detour through the morass of fallen, human language was required. As we shall see, this made the image more powerful magically, but it also made the sign transparent in a way that spoken language could never be. The great error of Renaissance linguistics here was to assume that the Egyptians had succeeded in achieving this goal; indeed, they likely erred in assuming that the Egyptians had had any interest in this goal.

Suppose, however, that Renaissance thinkers had been correct. This transparent and powerful hieroglyphic writing would then ground all other forms of writing, which in some sense derived from or were founded upon hieroglyphic concepts. That is, although in *DOP* Hebrew writing preceded hieroglyphics, this does not imply that Hebrew is not a kind of extended hieroglyphic alphabet. In other words, the idealized notion of the hieroglyph permits a smooth transition from ideal pictures and mathematics to alphabetic writing *without ever entering the ordinary sphere of linguistics*. Spoken and written language could thus be kept apart, in the natural and the celestial worlds, respectively.

Complex Signs

If hieroglyphs are the most iconic form of writing, we have already seen that they must ground the alphabet in some way. A transitional stage is presented in the form of geomantic figures, "the middle betwixt images and characters. . . . Being engraven or imprinted under the dominion of their planets and signs, [they] do conceive the virtue and power of images,"[66] in the sense that they draw down celestial and elemental powers as al-Kindi describes. At the same time, they are almost characters, because they are made when "geomantical diviners do reduce the points of their lots projected, by the excess of parity or imparity," which is to say that the geomancer generates the figures by first poking out lines of dots in the ground, then determining which lines have an odd and which an even number of dots, then deriving a series of figures from these four

[66] *DOP* II:48, 367/397.

binaries.[67] Like the magic square sigils, geomantic figures cannot be interpreted without knowledge of their construction, and are similarly abstracted (and thus like characters).

Hebrew letters are similarly complex in *DOP*, in that they are not only characters, but also in a sense images, and beyond this rest upon a special divine and celestial foundation. "[T]he writing of the Hebrews is of all the most sacred in the figures of characters, points of vowels, and tops of accents, being placed in matter, form, and spirit just as the first stars were sown in their positions in the seat of God, which is Heaven." One reading of this is that Hebrew characters derive from the positions of the stars, and are hence celestial images of some sort. But it can equally be taken to mean that they are like constellations themselves, such that the shapes of the characters were impressed upon them directly (i.e. arbitrarily) by God.

Every aspect of Hebrew characters has multiple functions in *DOP*. In I:74, we learn that the magus "that will find them out, must by each joining together of the letters so long examine them, until the voice of God is manifest, and the framing of the most sacred letters be opened and discovered"; in other words, the divine breath resides in the intersections between characters.[68] Hebrew characters also serve a numerical function, as explained before with *gematria*. The structure of the alphabet, too, correlates to the astrological and elemental powers, such that there "are threemothers,viz.אוי[*alef-waw-yod*], seven double, viz. בגדכפרת [*bet-gimel-daleṭ-kaf-peh-reś-ṭav*]; the other twelve, viz. הזחטל מנסעצקש [*he-zayin-ḥeṭ-teṭ-lamed-mem-nun-sameḥ-ayin-ẓade-qof-śin* are simple," paralleling the elements "Fire, Water, and Earth, for they account Air no element," the seven planets, and the twelve zodiac signs, respectively, as shown in the table which accompanies I:74.[69] Finally, of course, the words

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[67] Agrippa wrote a short treatise which explains all the details of geomantic practice: *Geomanticae disciplinae lectura*, in *Opera* 1:500-26, also translated in most editions of *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*; see also Donald Tyson's explanation in his Appendix VIII to *DOP*, pages 773-84.

[68] *DOP* I:74, 242/224. One wonders whether this might refer obliquely to the masoretic pointing system, which adds the "breath" of vowels to the consonants.

[69] *DOP* I:74, 244/225. This set of associations clearly derives from *Sefer yeẓirah*, but *DOP* gives אוי as the *matres*, unlike *Sefer yezirah*, where the mothers (ימות) are אמש. Presumably Agrippa is thinking of the *matres lectionis*, which in Hebrew would be הוי, but in Aramaic and a few variants of Hebrew would be as Agrippa lists them; further close analysis of such issues might shed light on Agrippa's knowledge of Hebrew. He is clearly aware of *Sefer yeẓirah*, at least indirectly, because he gives the "dual" letters as *bgdkprt* (בגדכפרת), where *resh* would not normally be considered dual, i.e. having a double pronunciation, as for example *beth* (ב) being pronounced "b" or "v"; the list of "dual"

of Scripture were originally written in Hebrew, and thus any letter can serve as an abbreviation for words which begin with that letter.

Name

Names are a special form of complex signs. A demon's name is sometimes meaningful in a simple sense, in that "sometimes names of spirits are taken from those things over which they are set," "being as it were borrowed from the stars, or men, or places, or times, or such like things, the divine name [e.g. אל, *el*] being added at the end." For example, *Zedekiel* is one name of the spirit of Jupiter, from the Hebrew name of Jupiter *ẓedek* [צדק], or "if we call them [these demons] from the Latin words . . . *Joviel*. . . ."[70]

Names have a singular referent—a demonic name refers only to a single demon. At the same time, written names are aggregates, combinations of basic written forms to make up complex, representative structures.[71] Moreover, names were impressed upon objects by Adam, and hence have an arbitrary symbolic character not dependent on the characters or elements of which they are constituted. Adam's function as nomothete is well known, but it is crucial to recognize the relationship between Adam's naming and the Divine nominative function.

> [A]s the great operator doth produce divers species, and particular things by the influences of the heavens, and by the elements, together with the virtues of planets; so according to the properties of the influences proper names result to things, and are put upon them by him who numbers the multitude of the stars, calling them all by their names, of which names Christ in another place speaks, saying, Your names are written in heaven.
>
> Adam therefore that gave the first names to things, knowing the influences of the heavens, and properties of all things, gave them all names according to their natures, as it is written in Genesis, where God brought all things that he had created before Adam, that he should name them, and as

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letters is well attested in the Christian Kabbalistic texts of the day, including Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* and Zorzi's *De harmonia mundi*, but Agrippa's alteration of the *matres* is striking. In passing, I note that this list of seven dual letters is accurate to Samaritan Hebrew orthography, which may perhaps be suggestive of *Sefer yeẓirah*'s origins: see Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153-56.

[70] *DOP* III:28, 488/553.

[71] In many cases, of course, these aggregates or complex structures might be called *words*, but this would in much of *DOP* be extremely misleading.

> he named anything, so the name of it was, which names indeed contain in them wonderful powers of the things signified.
>
> Every voice therefore that is significative, first of all signifies by the influence of the celestial harmony; secondly, by the imposition of man. . . . But when both significations meet in any voice or name, which are put upon them by the said harmony or man, then that name is with a double virtue, viz. natural, and arbitrary, made most efficacious to act, as oft as it shall be uttered in due place, and time, and seriously with an intention exercised upon the matter rightly disposed, and that can naturally be acted upon by it.[72]

Here the additive nature of reference is made abundantly clear. Names, like signs in general, can be doubly powerful if they combine natural and arbitrary modes of signification. The argument of the whole passage is that *spoken names* rely for their power on (1) the celestial world, in the form of the influence of the stars and harmonies, and (2) human (and divine) reason, in the arbitrary reason of the ultimate nomothetes Adam and Christ. In effect, then, the power of names depends entirely upon the rational, celestial world.

Celestial names parallel this structure, in the sense that a spirit's name may come either from its powers and office or from human imposition.

> [T]he masters of the Hebrews think that the names of angels were imposed upon them by Adam. . . . Hence . . . it is in the power of man to impose names upon spirits, but of such a man only who is dignified, and elevated to this virtue by some divine gift, or sacred authority. But . . . names for the most part are put upon them from their works, signifying some certain office, or effect.[73]

In sum, names are the preeminent form of complex signs, and rest upon the foundation of all other forms of signs. Their referential power seems to derive partly from the status of the nomothetes, but at the same time *DOP* argues that every perfect name is made up of constituent elements, from number through hieroglyph to Hebrew character, such that the total referential power is grounded in the fabric of the celestial and natural universe. As we shall see in the next chapter (page 193 below), this relation can be reversed—it can be argued that the universe depends from the simple and absolute power of true names, and that all natural and celestial aspects of such names are merely artifacts of the divine names. In such a

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[72] *DOP* I:70, 233/213.

[73] *DOP* III:24, 468-69/532; we shall return to this passage in chapter 4 (page 186 below).

conception, the natural and celestial aspects of divine names form a kind of laddered hierarchy which the magus climbs to reach the Divine.

The Power of the Sign

Now that the hierarchy of signs is relatively clear, we can move on to understand the underlying semiotic theory of *DOP*. For simplicity's sake, I use C. S. Peirce's famous triad, *icon*, *index*, and *symbol*. In brief, a *symbol* is a purely conventional and arbitrary sign, like a word in a natural language. An *icon* is a sign which is connected with its referent by a relationship of resemblance, like a picture of a thing. An *index* is a sign connected to its referent by some ontological relationship, like a footprint, a pointing finger, or a label on a jar.[74]

As we have seen, *DOP* makes use of all these forms of signification, but constantly mixes them together for magical purposes. In this section, I shall explain not only why different sign-types are so readily mixed, but also why this combinatorics has magical implications. In short, *DOP* presumes that multiple types of reference can be simultaneously present in any one sign, and that more references produce a more powerful connection between sign and referent.

Divine Arbitrariness

> The omnipotent God hath by his providence divided the speech of men into divers languages; which languages have according to their diversity received divers, and proper characters of writing, consisting in their certain order, number, and figure, not so disposed, and formed by hap, or chance, nor by the weak judgement of man, but from above, whereby they agree with the celestial, and divine bodies, and virtues. But before all notes of languages, the writing of the Hebrew is of all the most sacred in the figures of characters, points of vowels, and tops of accents, being placed in matter,

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[74] One can hardly give a reference for this (in)famous Peirceian typology; I have found most useful the essays in Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok, eds., *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, particularly Sebeok's "One, Two, Three Spells UBERTY," 1-10. Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976; reprint, Bloomington: Midland Books, 1979) is useful but uncharacteristically turgid; an excellent introduction is Thomas A. Sebeok, *The Sign and Its Masters*, 2d ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).

> form, and spirit just as the first stars were sown in their positions in the seat of God, which is Heaven.[75]

The argument here parallels Reuchlin and Pico,[76] to the effect that the characters of Hebrew writing arise from Divine providence, not from "the weak judgement of man"—in other words, they are not arbitrary. But *DOP* suggests that *all* writing is of this nature, not just Hebrew, although Hebrew is clearly the most powerful and divine. Given that all language is to some degree fallen from its pristine, Adamic state, *DOP* in effect argues that Hebrew *is* arbitrary, *but that it is not completely so.*[77]

Here we have a striking notion of the arbitrary nature of the sign. In modern theories, "arbitrary" is generally opposed to "natural," where the typical example of "natural signification" is Cratylus's idea that all words ultimately derive their meaning from onomatopoeia.[78] "Natural" is here a euphemism for concrete, material, *real*—if a sign had a natural significance in this sense, it would be obvious to everyone what it *must* mean, like language before Babel.

In *DOP*, however, a sign ordained by God is both completely arbitrary and completely real in every possible sense of *real.* It is simply not true that Hebrew, or any other language, is "natural" in the Cratylian sense, as every Christian Hebraist was very well aware. But is this because God did not in any way ordain the Hebrew language, such that it is simply a language like any other? On the contrary, *all languages* are "not so

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[75] *DOP* I:74, 241/223: " Sermonem vero hominum ipse omnipotens Deus sua providentia in diversas linguas divisit, quae quidem linguae iuxta suam diversitatem etiam diversos ac proprios receperunt scripturae characteres, suo quodam certo ordine, numero et figura constantes, non fortuito, nec casu, nec fragili hominum arbitrio, sed divinitus sic dispositos atque formatos, quo cum coelestibus atque ipsis divinis corporibus virtutibusque consentiant. Prae omnibus vero linguarum notis Hebraeorum scriptura omnium sacratissima est in figuris characterum, punctis vocalium et apicipbus accentuum veluti in materia, forma et spiritu consistens, in sede Dei, quod coelum est, siderum positione primum exarata."

J.F. misunderstands the last portion of this passage, placing a period and paragraph break between "forma et spiritu consistens" and the final phrase, which he renders, "The position of the stars being first made in the seat of God, which is heaven. . . ."

[76] See Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah* [De arte cabalistica], trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 293 (73ᵛ) *et passim* in book 3.

[77] The complex nature of Hebrew will be particularly important in Book III, where Kabbalah becomes a central issue.

[78] For a fascinating and insightful account of Cratylian thought through the ages, see Gerard Genette, *Mimologics*, trans. Thaïs E. Morgan (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

disposed, and formed by hap, or chance, nor by the weak judgement of man, but from above, whereby they agree with the celestial, and divine bodies, and virtues."

The solution to this apparent paradox is an exceptionally simple piece of Christian theology: it is *man* who has fallen, not God—it is the *natural* world which is farthest from the ultimately Real. Thus for *DOP* the whole relation between arbitrary and natural has to be reversed, because there is no special privilege in "natural" signification. The reason that Divinely arbitrary signs are not transparent signifiers is that humanity no longer exists in Paradise, and thus the Divine language is no more obvious to us than is the Divine Will.

Iconicity

We are told that the *figure* of written characters, i.e. their graphic appearance, was laid down "just as the first stars were sown in their positions in the seat of God." In some sense, the shape of the characters is iconic, such that each letter depicts the stars. Book II, chapter 52 discusses "characters which are drawn from things themselves by a certain likeness." These characters have "a certain probable similitude with the celestial images," in that they are more or less equivalent to drawings of constellations or other groupings of stars in which the stars, represented by dots, have been connected with lines (not unlike the construction of demonic sigils by connecting letters with lines).[79]

DOP's "practice of images" uses images to draw the powers and influences desired, by means which parallel al-Kindi rather well. The image is constructed of the proper materials, in the proper form, at the proper time, and so forth. In al-Kindi's terms, the image so constructed is ideally attuned to the relevant rays. As we have seen, though, al-Kindi argues that the two most important parts of image-construction are words and will, neither of which appears central to *DOP*'s practice in Book II.

The use of words in images is indicated in the instructions for the image of dreams: "thou shalt write upon the breast of the man [in the image] the name of the effect desired, and in the hand of the angel the name of the intelligence of the Sun." In the twenty-odd years between the juvenile draft and the final one, then, a few words have been added to the practice of images, but there is no indication that these written names are

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[79] *DOP* II:52, 376-78/409-10.

anything but additional empowering signs which increase the image's indexical connection with its object. In short, the practice of images in II:50 does not seem to reflect al-Kindi's emphasis on words.

As to the effects of will, there is no explicit mention of any act of will, although such acts are central to the ceremonial magic of Book III (page 177 below). For the moment, let us note that the creation of an image has a dual purpose. First, the image has a specific function, as producing true dreams. Second, and more interesting for *DOP*'s general theory of images, the magician by his practice tries to "give a soul to an image, or make a stone to live, or metal, or wood, or wax. . . . [and] raise out of stones children unto Abraham." At base, then, an image is a form of writing which, like the Divine breath, impresses life upon the medium.

The implicit theory of iconism can be clarified by recalling Panofsky's tripartite division of *pre-iconography*, *iconography*, and *iconology*.[80] At the most basic level, a magical image is pre-iconographical; it pictorially represents in a manner which is non-cultural, founded only upon fundamental *natural* structures, such as number (in the simple sense), natural form, and so forth. Thus the image for dreams represents in a simple pictorial mode (the man and the angel), and in a natural mode (the image is gold because gold is naturally solar, etc.).

At an iconographic level, arbitrary cultural references enter the representation. In magical images, these references are *rational*, based upon human language and reason, as well as certain celestial structures of Form, such as the planets and their inherent images. Thus the image for dreams requires cultural knowledge in order to understand clearly the function: it is necessary to know that the sun is appropriate for dreams. In addition, the sigil, name, and "name of the effect" written upon the image require rational knowledge, of language, magical history, and perhaps of the Bible (if the name of the effect is drawn from Scripture).

With the move to iconology, the power of the image manifests in a theoretical way. Recall that iconology is the mode of interpretation in which the interpreter understands the image as revealing fundamental structures of the world which made it. Similarly, the magical images depend on interpretation, not as a scholarly mode but as a mode of power and action. To put it differently, the image performs its function, defined by its iconography, by manifesting the fundamental structures of the world upon which it depends. The only absolute difference (and it is a deep

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[80] See page 14 above.

divide) between Panofsky's theory of representation and that of *DOP* is the position of the human agent: in Panofsky, this is the art historian as interpreter; in *DOP* the agent is the magus-constructor, controlling the image's effect by predetermining its iconological content.

Analog Signification

We have encountered several hints of an additive, cumulative, or degree-concept theory of signification, particularly obviously in our discussion of names, where *DOP* spoke of a name having "a double virtue, viz. natural and arbitrary." We also saw that Hebrew letters refer because of an intrinsic property, Divine arbitrariness, and also because they are models of or for the placement of the stars, which is a form of iconicity. Further, it is clear that such figures as the planetary characters refer because they condense the effects of several sub-systems, i.e. numerological significance, *gematria*, geometrical harmony, magic squares, etc.

The notion that a sign can refer for multiple reasons and in multiple ways, not all of them arbitrary, simultaneously, is crucial for understanding *DOP*'s theory of signification, and is a concept that I shall call *analog signification*. Analog signification is a mode of signifying which cannot be expressed in binary yes/no terms (signifies/does not signify), but only in terms of *how much*. This idea, although taken more or less for granted in *DOP*, is quite alien to modern semiotics and linguistic philosophy. I suspect that analog signification has considerable potential for shaking up modern philosophies of language, a point to which I return in the conclusion chapter (page 221 below); for the moment, however, it is necessary to understand the concept and how it functions in *DOP*.

Modern semiotics and linguistic philosophy asks how it is that a sign has meaning. The answer is, at base, invariably the same: all signs signify because of arbitrary cultural factors. Umberto Eco argues that Peirce's *icon*, which graphically depicts its signified, is based upon arbitrary cultural factors (i.e. is a *symbol*) because the nature of graphic representation is fundamentally cultural. The possible exception to this universal arbitrariness is Peirce's *index*, for which the relation between sign and signified rests upon physical (or rather ontological) connection or contiguity. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that indexicality falls into arbitrariness

because physical connection and contiguity are culturally determined: the act of pointing has cultural baggage, and is not just a "natural" indicator.[81]

Clearly *DOP* does not entirely accept this theory, given that the structure of writing is "not so disposed, and formed by hap, or chance, nor by the weak judgement of man, but from above, whereby they agree with the celestial, and divine bodies, and virtues." At the same time, *De vanitate* argues that

> there is no rule of the Truth, than the decrees and will of some, that did first teach: the which is most manifestly seen, even by the very invention of Letters. . . . [A]nd this is the alteration of times [*temporum vicissitudo*], that there are no Letters, no Tongues, the which at this day do acknowledge, or understand the form or manner of their Antiquity. . . .[82]

But these positions do not entirely clash, and may be reconciled as follows: all writing was ordained by Divine providence to correlate with the celestial and divine; over time, most forms of writing fell from their primal state, and concomitantly true knowledge of them was lost.

The most fundamental difference between *DOP*'s semiotics and its modern cousins is that *DOP* gives no privilege to binary distinction. Semioticians and linguists generally claim to think of signification in binary terms—in modern English, the written sign "cat" and the spoken \'kat\ both refer to the animal. While Jakobson and others might argue that the written sign "cat" depends upon the spoken system, as we have seen, this does not alter the fact that "cat" signifies the animal (albeit arbitrarily). Interestingly, however, the logic of Jakobson's argument that spoken language has a "primary, fundamental nature" depends on the same logic as Householder's argument for the logical priority of written language. Implicitly, both are arguing about *how much* the sign refers, not *whether* it refers—if one form of language is "primary," then it is *more fundamental* in some sense. The binary nature of reference is thus tempered when dealing with written versus spoken language.

DOP does not assume that signification is binary. On the contrary, the entire theory is analog, and rests on the notion that a given signifier can be more or less strongly connected with its signified. Under normal circumstances, e.g. the daily usage of language, the connection is weak, dependent almost entirely upon cultural factors. When the use of

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[81] See Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, esp. section 3.5, "Critique of iconism," 191-217.
[82] *De vanitate* 2, 8-10/19-21.

language for ordinary communication is at issue, *DOP* agrees heartily with modern semiotics and linguistics. With regard to magical communication, however, signifier and signified can be connected much more strongly. If the connection is sufficiently strong, the magus produces the situation described in al-Kindi, where an alteration of the sign produces a corresponding alteration of the referent.

In the context of magical writing, as we have seen, the magus must employ a chain of reference to other systems—*gematria*, proportion, numbers, etc.—to make the sign signify at all, or to be sure that it does.[83] The signifier is not bound to a single such chain, however, but can point to the signified in a number of ways, by means of multiple exterior systems. The most important point about this is that the number and dignity of the systems involved in any given signification process is *cumulative*: the more distinct and powerful the modes of signification employed, the greater the ability of the sign to signify—and ultimately to *control*—its object.

DOP's theory of analog signification stands Peirce on his head. Every sign is, *to some degree*, symbol, icon, and index. As a symbol, the sign is arbitrary, determined by intelligences apart from nature. This is true in two senses—every sign is determined by both human and divine intellects, which are both distinct from nature. As an icon, the sign depends more or less directly on a pictorial representation of its object. At one extreme, a magical image is nothing more than a complex picture; at the other, the demonic sigils derive from Hebrew characters and geometry and so forth, and thus depend only very indirectly on iconicity. As an index, the sign has an ontological connection to its object, which can be more or less strong, and in the magical context is best expressed as its *power*.

Indexicality: the Power of the Sign

Indexicality is, as it was for Peirce, rather the wild-card in *DOP*'s semiotics. Every sign is an index because there is *always* an ontological connection between sign and referent, even (as we have seen) with arbitrary natural language. Again, as with the symbolic and the iconic, the indexical quality of a sign in *DOP* is one of degree. The Hebrew character *kaf* (כ) is

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[83] With many semioticians, such a process of exterior reference is by implication a weakening process—written language is less "fundamental," i.e. less *true*, because it requires the user to refer outwards to the spoken before the signification is established.

connected to the Sun because of divine ordination, which divided the alphabet into mothers, duals (planetary), and simples (zodiacal). If *kaf* is inscribed upon a gold talisman, at an appropriate solar time, it will point more strongly toward the Sun—the ontological, indexical character of the sign is strengthened.

Here *DOP* breaks from conventional sign-theory most completely. Contemporaries would certainly have recognized and accepted analog signification, but by claiming a necessary indexicality *DOP* makes a logical but extremely dangerous move. It is here also that the crux of *DOP*'s linguistic theory hangs in the balance, for without the indexicality of all signs, magic becomes at once haphazard and deeply suspect.

The logic of the claim is relatively straightforward. If we grant the possibility of analog signification, we place all signs on a kind of continuum. At one end, we have the almost purely arbitrary signs of ordinary speech; here natural iconism is so attenuated as to be irrelevant—*DOP* does not propose a Cratylian theory—but nonetheless natural speech derives from, i.e. is iconically related to, ideal language before Babel, and similar arguments can be made about any apparently cultural-arbitrary sign. At the opposite end of the scale, we have Divinely arbitrary signs, which have an obviously ontological relation to their referents: God speaks, and the world comes into being. Given this continuum and a Neoplatonic universe, all signs participate in the Divine to some degree. That is, every sign has some relation to the natural, celestial, or divine world, which by hierarchical participation requires that all signs ultimately participate in Divinity. Therefore, logically, all signs have ontological connections to their referents.

Furthermore, the power of Divine expression is that it creates what is expressed, makes its meaning actual. By extension, all signs have this power, although in the vast majority of cases it is insufficient to create effects. By recognizing the different modes of signification, then adding them one to another, it is possible to make a sign more ontologically connected to its referent. If the modes of signification employed are hierarchically superior to the referent, e.g. if a celestial sign is employed vis-à-vis a natural object, the sign's power is likely sufficient to dominate the referent. Therefore the ultimate effect of a magician's perfect application of *DOP*'s semiotic principles is that magical actions dominate worldly things.

Most importantly, this domination depends upon one absolute requirement—that God rule the universe. In other words, if the precepts

of Christian faith are accurate, argues *DOP*, magical power is not only effective but dependent on the Divine.

As a final note on the theory of powerful signs, let us recall that *De vanitate* argues that all knowledge is vain, and only faith in God is certain. The magical argument just explicated in no way disagrees with this. On the contrary, it is an attempt to restructure knowledge such that it requires only the truth of Christian revelation. If it is granted that all human knowledge is ultimately linguistic/semiotic, i.e. depends entirely upon signs and signification, then *DOP*'s approach is to hang all signification from the one immutable point. The parallel to Descartes is peculiar but interesting: where Descartes descends the scale until he reaches the lowest common denominator of reason, *cogito ergo sum*, and then attempts to rebuild knowledge from that fixed point, *DOP* grants a fixed point in God and then hangs all knowledge from it.[84]

Inscribing the Powers

We know that "whatsoever is in the mind, in voice, in word, in oration, and in speech, the whole, and all of this is in writing also. And as nothing which is conceived in the mind is not expressed by voice, so nothing which is expressed is not also written."[85] So what is the difference between a written and a spoken name? And what is the effect of writing a name?

Let us recall our extended version of Vachek's characteristics of writing: interpretive control by the recipient rather than the producer, arbitrary divisibility, and spatial rather than temporal extension. The latter two qualities have already been discussed in the context of analog signification: magical signs are arbitrarily divisible both visually and into distinct levels, the totality of the sign's meaning and power deriving from the sum of all these factors. We have also seen, in the context of the dominating indexical power of the sign, that control of the sign is a difficult issue in *DOP*. When we come to think about what it means to write or inscribe a magical figure, however, the question of control becomes central and rather clearer.

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[84] The parallelism between Descartes and Agrippa, mentioned briefly on page 95 above, will be drawn in some detail in the conclusion chapter, when we have a clearer sense of the scope of Agrippa's project (see page 217 below).

[85] *DOP* I:73, 240/221.

Contrary to popular opinion, *DOP* does not condone the summoning of infernal demons, and suggests that controlling angels is essentially impossible.[86] Nevertheless many spirits, particularly celestial ones, can be summoned and controlled by a magician, and the inscription of demonic names is generally a major part of the process. The summoning and control of higher spirits is the focus of Book III, and will be discussed in the next chapter, but the basic theory of such processes, and the place of writing therein, are contained implicitly in such discussions as the magic squares of Book II.

The crucial point is that the names of spirits must be understood as *instruments*:

> [S]acred words have not their power in magical operations, from themselves, as they are words, but from the occult divine powers working by them in the minds of those who by faith adhere to them; by which words the sacred power of God as it were through conduit pipes, is transmitted into [the faithful magicians].[87]

Similarly,

> material numbers, and figures can do nothing . . . but representatively by formal numbers, and figures, as they are governed, and informed by intelligences, and divine numerations, which unite the extremes of the matter, and spirit to the will of the elevated soul, receiving through great affection, by the celestial power of the operator, a power from God, applied through the Soul of the Universe, and observations of celestial constellations, to a matter fit for a form, the mediums being disposed by the skill, and industry of magicians. . . .[88]

One way to put this, then, is that divine power, the active force in all natural things, acts upon the natural through and by means of the celestial. Celestial things are similarly structured, such that the highest celestial governors act upon formal numbers and figures by means of harmony, proportion, and the various characters. In effect, written language is the conduit of power between the celestial governors and the simple Platonic forms. By the Hermetic analogy of microcosm and macrocosm, the whole

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[86] *DOP* III:32, 498-500/566-68: "[W]hosoever shall . . . work in evil spirits . . . only worldlily [i.e. without the assistance of God], shall work to himself judgement and damnation." "Now good spirits, if they may be divers ways called up, yet can by no bounds, or very hardly be allayed by us."

[87] *DOP* III:11, 431/476.

[88] *DOP* II:22, 310/318.

of writing/language is the conduit of power between God and Nature: God uses language to create—"And God said, Let there be light."

The power of mathematical magic is twofold. First, one may produce enormous effects in the natural world, as "in former times rocks have been cut off, and valleys made, and mountains made into a plain. . . ." Second, one can impart celestial virtues, "as motion, life, sense, speech, soothsaying, and divination, even in matter less disposed, as that which is not made by nature, but only by art. And so images that speak, and foretell things to come, are said to be made, as William of Paris relates of a brazen head."[89] Writing takes "abstracted, mathematical, and celestial" virtues and imparts them upon natural objects, making them concrete, thus bringing celestial and divine powers into the natural world.

As we know, writing shifts the locus of control from producer to recipient. This characteristic seems to be reversed in *DOP*, as it is the inscriber who controls the discourse. But it is more accurate to say that the inscriber controls the sign inscribed, which is not the same as its meaning or significance. With magic squares, for example, the magus is both producer and in a sense recipient of the marks and characters. The inscription of a sigil imbues the talisman with demonic power, but the *significance* of the talisman is its application, not the demon. Once properly inscribed, the talisman is indexically linked to the demon, but it is not accurate to say that the talisman *means* the demon, any more than an electric appliance means electricity. The appliance's significance is best understood in relation to function, as a refrigerator and food preservation; similarly, a talisman's significance should be expressed in terms of what it does, as with a talisman of the Intelligence of Saturn (*Agiel*) which "doth help to bring forth, or birth, and to make a man safe, and powerful, and to cause success of petitions with princes, and powers. . . ."

Once again, it is clear that *DOP* makes a peculiar distinction between iconicity and symbolism on the one hand, and indexicality on the other. Magical writing is indexically linked to powers, virtues, demons, or other supernatural forces, but the *significance* of such writing can only be understood in *nature*, that is by effects, which can in turn be predicted or prescribed by iconism and symbolism.

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[89] *DOP* II:1, 250-51/234; the reference is to William of Paris, *De universo*, in *Opera*, ed. B. Leferon (Orléans, 1674-5), 1:1, 51, p. 670 F-G (see Compagni, note to *DOP* II:1, 251).

Fixity and Inscription

When a magician writes, he places himself in an analogical relationship with the divine. As God deploys language to create life, so the magus deploys language to vivify. The magus cannot *create* life, but he can control or channel it, causing an object to *acquire* life. This operation requires that the magus be like God in miniature, knowing everything about the object, understanding fully the powers employed, spiritually pure in every way.

> But who can give a soul to an image, or make a stone to live, or metal, or wood, or wax? And who can raise out of stones children unto Abraham? Certainly this arcanum doth not enter into an artist of a stiff neck: neither can he give those things which hath them not. Nobody hath them but he who doth (the elements being restrained, nature being overcome, the heavens being overpowered) transcend the progress of angels, and comes to the very Archetype itself, of which being then made a cooperator may do all things. . . .

Here the argument for the sacred character of magic is particularly explicit. The true magus is one who first dominates and transcends the natural and celestial, then rises "to the very Archetype itself" in order to become a "cooperator." The problem of diabolical magic was raised in *De vanitate* in the context of false miracles, as we saw in chapter one (page 40 above):

> For all they that presume to divine and prophecy not in the truth, not in the virtue of God, but in the illusion of devils, according to the operation of wicked spirits, and exercising deceits of idolatry, and showing illusions and vain visions, the which suddenly ceasing, *they avaunt that they can work miracles, by Magical vanities*, . . . all these . . . shall be condemned to the pains of everlasting fire. [emphasis mine].

In *DOP* we see a clear explanation of this passage, in that the true magus who has risen to the Divine does not claim to work miracles by magical "vanities," but *actually* performs miracles in the light and faith of God, whose absolute truth verifies and validates the miracles as something other than vanities. Once again, *DOP*'s magic attempts a rectification and overcoming of all the "vanities" of knowledge by pinning them all to the unshakeable truth of faith.

Conclusions

In chapter two, we saw that *DOP*'s natural magic is in a sense investigative, a process of understanding the nature of God incarnate in the world. At the same time, the natural magic is "operative," to use Yates's term, in that the higher aspects of human nature (those which touch the celestial, such as fantasy and especially reason) have a material impact. Not surprisingly, then, we have found that the mathematical magic, rooted in the celestial, is a magic of enacting, of understanding and manipulating the ways in which the higher functions dominate nature. Since mathematical and celestial magic is superior to the natural, the hierarchical structure of *DOP* and the universe ensures that the former dominates the latter. Thus mastery of mathematical magic entails dominance over the natural world.

The central theoretical issue of Book II is linguistic or semiotic, focused on the nature of signification. When this communicative orientation is placed in context, between the natural and the divine, it becomes clear that the mathematical communicates between the two, such that the magus approaches the divine through the celestial. Ultimately, Book II proposes a skeleton theory of the sign in a (to us) peculiar context: granted God's existence, goodness, omnipotence, etc., how can signs function and what do they accomplish?

In the next chapter, I turn to the final portion of *DOP*, the religious or ceremonial magic (Book III), in which the occult philosophy comes to fruition. We shall see that, just as there are three worlds, there are three modes of language, and that the true magus's destiny is to dominate all worlds through command of all languages and thus of all realities.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LANGUAGE OF DEMONS AND ANGELS

> The most fleeting thought obeys an invisible plan, and may crown, or inaugurate, a secret design. . . . No one is someone; a single immortal man is all men. Like Cornelius Agrippa, I am god, hero, philosopher, demon, and world—which is a long-winded way of saying that *I am not.*
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, *The Immortal*

In Book III, we move to the consummation of the magical art, the divine, religious, or ceremonial magic, which completes the magical and philosophical project begun in Books I and II. In the interest of clarity, let me briefly recapitulate the problems which remain at the outset.

In Book I, *DOP* implied that demonic magic is not only licit, but perhaps *required* for the highest forms of magic; Book III takes up this question explicitly, discussing demonic magic quite openly. In the present analysis, then, we must discover (1) what exactly is meant by demonic magic, and (2) how contact with demons can elevate the magus to the divine. Furthermore, we must ask what purpose is served by such elevation; that is, what the point of demonic magic is, and how it fits into the more general problematic of the magician's relationship to God.

In Book II, the primary focus was linguistic, demonstrating the philosophical possibility of transparent and powerful written signs. As we begin reading Book III, it is not clear how this power of writing interacts with divinity. In other words, if the natural world is ruled by the power of speech, and the celestial world by that of writing, what linguistic structure applies to the divine? Beyond this, we must ask what kind of linguistic relationships obtain between the magician and the forces which rule the divine sphere, not only God Himself but also the angels.

Book III includes *DOP*'s most detailed discussions of both Kabbalah and ritual, issues which haunted the margins of both the natural and especially the celestial magic. In the present chapter, then, it will be crucial to situate *DOP* with respect to scholarship on Kabbalah and ritual. This analysis raises a number of questions whose answers will inform our

understanding of *DOP* in general; in the conclusion chapter they will also aid in explicating the ramifications of our reading of *DOP* for scholarship on the history and theory of magic.

With respect to Kabbalah, the primary question is whether Agrippa's ritual-magical Kabbalah is Kabbalah at all. As we shall see, this leads to two broader issues: magic in Kabbalah generally, and the relationship between Christian Kabbalah and its Jewish sources. I shall argue that Agrippa's Kabbalah is a deeply Christian and skeptical reinterpretation of Kabbalah, which nevertheless is not fundamentally at odds with the tradition of Kabbalah as it came down to him.

The second problem, that of magical ritual, takes us into the realm of ritual theory. At heart, the question here is whether Agrippa's ritual magic can be understood as ritual, which is really dependent on the more general question of whether magic is religion. I do not propose to address the latter question in detail, although some consideration of the problem will appear in the conclusion chapter. For the moment, I shall simply take it for granted that *DOP*'s ritual magic is indeed ritual.

At the same time, the framework of Agrippa's magic is such that it requires some rethinking of ritual theory more generally; in particular, much of the semiotic or symbolic interpretive theory of ritual depends upon a highly logocentric conception of language, privileging speech over writing in a way radically inconsistent with Agrippa's magical precepts. As such, I will propose a writing-centered approach to ritual, whose value will I hope be borne out by its effectiveness in the analysis.

In what follows, then, I have three objectives. First and foremost, I wish to demonstrate that Book III does indeed propose a theory which connects the various problems and hanging threads from Books I and II, and furthermore does so in a way which satisfies the theological concerns at hand. Second, I want to show that this theory, depending as it does upon a written rather than oral model of communication, fits quite neatly into Kabbalistic structures, and thus indicates that academic dismissals of magical Christian Kabbalah are over-hasty. Third, I would like to suggest that the written theory of ritual magic proposed here has considerable utility for modern scholars of ritual. Moreover, I believe such a theory will aid materially in rethinking magic as a distinct category, not divorced from that of religion but nevertheless not entirely coterminous with it; this last point will be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter.

Magical Kabbalah

Scholars make a number of standard divisions within Kabbalah, generally identical or at least parallel to divisions internal to that tradition. Thus we read of *merkavah* (chariot) mysticism and *bereshit* (creation) mysticism, Zoharic and Yeẓiratic traditions, and so forth.[1] Premier among these distinctions, however, is that between *theosophical* and *ecstatic* Kabbalah.

This division has come to center-stage primarily through the work of Gershom Scholem and of Moshe Idel, Scholem's most important student. In essence, the distinction is between an abstract, contemplative, or theoretical Kabbalah and an active, practical Kabbalah. At the same time, the term "practical Kabbalah" has its own meaning, whose contestation and limitation within the scholarly community are rarely overt, but color all major studies of Kabbalah. The underlying argument is important and problematic, and before turning to Kabbalah in *DOP* I must devote some space to the category of "practical Kabbalah" as it relates to theosophical and ecstatic Kabbalah, particularly as "practical Kabbalah" is often understood to have some overlap with "magic."

Prior to the work of Gershom Scholem the category "Kabbalah," or "Jewish Mysticism," was usually pejorative and opposed to "Rabbinic Philosophy" or a similarly rationalistic category. Antisemitic scholars saw in Kabbalah the stupidity and superstition which they expected from Jews, while their philosemitic opponents wished to promote Jewish thought and history by calling attention to facets of that tradition more congenial to a late-nineteenth century scholarly audience. Thus the general agreement was that Kabbalah was not worth discussing—regardless of a given scholar's opinion of Judaism and the Jewish people, it was taken for granted that Kabbalah was superstitious nonsense.[2]

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[1] Interestingly, Agrippa makes similar distinctions in *De vanitate* 47, 99/135-36: "They deliver a double science therefore, the one of *Bresith*, which they call Cosmology, viz: explaining the powers of things created, natural, and celestial, and expounding the secrets of the Law and Bible by philosophical reasons. . . . They call the other science thereof of *Mercaba*, which is concerning the more sublime contemplations of divine and angelic virtues, and of sacred names, and seals. . . . This again they divide into Arithmancy, viz. that which is called *Notariacon*, treating of angelical virtues, names, and seals. . . and into Theomancy, which searcheth into the mysteries of divine majesty, as the emanations thereof, and sacred names. . . ." The text reads "*Mercara*" or "*Mercana*," depending on edition, clearly a printer's error, as noted by François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*, 2d ed. (Neully-sûr-Seine & Milan: Arma Artis & Archè, 1985), 12.

[2] For a brief historiography of Kabbalah scholarship up to Scholem, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 1-34.

Through his tremendous output of books and articles, of which *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* is one of the most influential, Scholem nearly singlehandedly re-invented scholarly opinion of Kabbalah.[3] So successful was this re-invention that it became possible to write dissertations and books about the subject, even to be a "Kabbalah expert" in a scholarly and entirely respectable sense. Indeed in modern Jewish studies, the erudition of "real Kabbalah experts" occasions considerable veneration and awe.

Scholem's restoration of Kabbalah to respectability required him to make certain more or less deliberate oversimplifications, in essence public-relations moves. For our purposes, the most relevant of these was his extreme (over)emphasis on the philosophical, systematic, and mystical-contemplative side of Kabbalah, and his concomitant suppression of practical and ecstatic Kabbalah. In short, Scholem made it appear that Kabbalah was predominantly an intellectual tradition of mystical contemplation, and implied that the ecstatic or magical parts of that tradition were irrelevant bastardizations. By this sleight—and it is surely a sleight to hide what may be the majority of Kabbalistic documents and practices!—he promoted Kabbalah as worthy of intellectual respect and stoutly defended it against charges of superstition.

Once Scholem had succeeded, however, it was inevitable that Kabbalah experts would wish to re-balance the equation; this project has fallen, in large part, to Scholem's student Moshe Idel. In his own considerable scholarly output, beginning with a doctoral dissertation on Abraham Abulafia, Idel has argued for the central importance to Kabbalah of the very practices once labeled "superstitious," i.e. practical Kabbalah. In his award-winning book *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Idel divided the Kabbalistic traditions into two main camps: the *theosophical*, which is to say the kinds of contemplative, philosophical ideas and figures emphasized by Scholem, and the *ecstatic*, on which he himself focused. Now that no serious scholar would dismiss Kabbalah on any grounds, Idel and his contemporaries could open up the possibility of studying the entire range of Kabbalistic material, from the earliest origins to the most recent incarnations, from the most abstract and contemplative to the most practical and applied forms.

At the same time Idel, until recently, subdivided the range of "acceptable" Kabbalah far more subtly than did Scholem. On numerous

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[3] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1946).

occasions Idel has argued, *contra* Scholem (and his predecessors), that practical Kabbalah must be added into the historiography of Kabbalah:

> To understand Kabbalah is, according [to such scholars], seen as tantamount to understanding its tenets. This approach is not new; it has been in use since the Renaissance, when Christian scholars interesting in occult lores involved themselves in the study of the Kabbalah. . . . But the evaluation of Kabbalah as predominantly theoretical rather than practical is misleading.[4]

As the discussion continues, it becomes clear that "practical" Kabbalah is essentially equivalent to "ecstatic" Kabbalah; thus the addition of Abraham Abulafia or of Hasidic ecstatic practices apparently makes Kabbalah, the scholarly object of study, coterminous with Kabbalah, the lived and living tradition of Jewish mysticism. As Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, the addition of "practical Kabbalah" to modern scholarship has really amounted to the addition of "mystical techniques," and has excluded the majority of what would more usually be called magic.[5]

But in some of his most recent books, Idel reveals implicitly that his earlier formulations actually discarded certain texts and practices—specifically, he had rejected forms of practical Kabbalah which do not fit into the narrower categories of ecstatic and theosophical Kabbalah, i.e. those which might be called magic.

Three Kabbalistic Models

Idel's most extended meditation on magic and its place in Kabbalah comes in his recent book on Ḥasidism,[6] in which he distinguishes among three "models":

> Three basic models can be seen competing throughout the history of Jewish mysticism: the theosophical-theurgical one, represented most eminently by Zoharic literature and the Safedian Kabbalah; the ecstatic, expressed in the writings of R. Abraham Abulafia, R. Yiẓḥaq of Acre, and some ecstatic Kabbalists; and the magical model, which is not expressed in

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[4] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 28.

[5] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Great Scott!" unpublished lecture, 1999.

[6] Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995); see also his *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

> a distinct body of Jewish mystical literature, but is present in certain writings of the other two models.[7]

Historiographically, these three models can also be associated with particular scholars: Scholem emphasized the theosophical-theurgical, the earlier Idel and most of his Israeli contemporaries emphasized the ecstatic, and the late Idel and some American scholars have included (if not perhaps emphasized) the magical.

The theosophical-theurgical model, so central in Gershom Scholem's scholarship, revolves around cosmological speculation of various sorts, most famously the theory of the ten emanations (*sefirot*) through which or by which the Creation was produced. The *sefirot* are usually greatly oversimplified in the numerous summaries of this doctrine which appear in scholarship on Christian Kabbalah, but in fact the Kabbalistic texts discussing the emanations are extremely various and complex; indeed, scholars from Scholem onwards have devoted many lengthy studies to comparative analyses of emanationist cosmologies and their theological precepts. For our purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that the *sefirot* were "conceived sometimes as the essence of God, and at other times as the vessel of the divine influx or the instruments of the divine activity."[8] In the context of Agrippa's exposure to Kabbalistic thought it is primarily Zoharic theosophy which is relevant, as several works of this kind were made available in Latin in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and were of particular importance to the Kabbalistic thought of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin.[9]

Through the translations, mistranslations, and reinterpretations of his teacher Flavius Mithridates, Pico was also aware of ecstatic literature, particularly that of Abraham Abulafia. The focus of this literature is the ideal of *devequt*, "as indicating moderate or extreme types of union with

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[7] Idel, *Hasidism*, 31.

[8] Idel, *Hasidism*, 66.

[9] See François Secret, *Le Zôhar chez les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1958) for detailed discussion of Zoharic influence in early Christian Kabbalah. On the sources of early Christian Kabbalah, the most important scholarship is that of Chaim Wirszubski, particularly his *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), particularly pages 10-68. For Agrippa's sources particularly, see the annotations to Perrone Compagni's critical edition of *DOP*. A reading of Wirszubski indicates clearly the almost incredible range of scholarship required to detail all the manuscript sources for an early Christian Kabbalist; the fact that Pico died after only eight years of Kabbalistic study makes all the more daunting any extended analysis of the sources for Reuchlin or the later Christian Kabbalists, and explains why no such study has to my knowledge ever been attempted.

the Godhead. The other important aspects of this model [the ecstatic] are techniques to ensure the attainment of this ideal."[10] Specifically,

> *Hitbodedut*, meaning both solitude and mental concentration, *hishtawwut* or equanimity, and linguistic techniques of combining Hebrew letters or contemplating divine names are integral constituents of the mystical-ecstatic model. Paranormal experiences, such as revelations and prophecies, are also integral to this type of mystical model, more consonant with it than they are with theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. . . .The paramount importance of the linguistic components of these techniques must also be emphasized. . . .[11]

As Idel himself admits, "The extent of the magical influence on Jewish mysticism is an issue that still awaits detailed treatment."[12] Some texts presume that the special character of the Hebrew language enables its manipulators to have "magical" effects in the world, specifically by drawing down the power of the higher spheres. Others claim that "it is by cleaving to the spiritual source that rules this world—the universal soul—that the mystic or philosopher is able to affect the events in the sublunar world," an idea which apparently stems from medieval contact between Jewish and Arabic thinkers.[13] The distinction made by Idel is between the magician's drawing down celestial forces on the one hand, and his rising above to command them on the other. He further notes a moral distinction between the two often made in Jewish sources from the fifteenth century and later, according to which "It is by fulfilling the divine will that the material and spiritual attainments are drawn down and not by attempts to force that will or short-circuit the order of nature."[14]

If in Idel's formulation there are three "models" in Kabbalah, the magical model does not arise from its own literature but is found expressed in some works of the other two models. For our present purpose of analyzing

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[10] Idel, *Hasidism*, 55. On Abulafia, see Idel's *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Albany: SUNY, 1988), and the majority of articles in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY, 1988).

[11] Idel, *Hasidism*, 55.

[12] Idel, *Hasidism*, 65.

[13] Idel, *Hasidism*, 65.

[14] Idel, *Hasidism*, 66-67; according to Idel this view is conspicuous in the writings of Shelomo ha-Levi Alqabetz, Moshe Cordovero, and Yohanan Alemanno, the latter a major source for Pico's Kabbalah and, presumably indirectly, for Agrippa's. Alemanno is also the chief source for Abraham Yagel (1553-c.1623), a Jewish physician, Kabbalist, and natural philosopher who also relied heavily on *DOP* as a source for his magical thinking; see David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Christian Kabbalistic magic in a single text, I would like to reformulate this structure; I wish to emphasize that this reformulation may or may not be applicable to the broad scope of Jewish Kabbalistic texts, and is intended here as a heuristic device for subdividing and clarifying the issues at stake in *DOP*'s Kabbalah.

For our purposes, then, we can say that Kabbalah has a speculative cosmological (theosophical) component, focused on the nature of the divine, commonly expressed in terms of the *sefirot* or emanations. Next, there is an ecstatic, mystical component, whose focus is on unity with the Godhead and the means of its achievement. Under these two general headings are sometimes found exteriorizing, "magical" practices. In some cases, these magical techniques are intended to draw down power from the *sefirot*, and may be understood as a kind of practical application of theosophical doctrines. In other cases, the magical techniques are more closely related to ecstatic techniques, and are intended to elevate the practitioner toward the Godhead, the main distinction between the magical and the ecstatic here being the magician's intent to deploy divine forces in the world subsequent to his elevation above it.

Christian Kabbalah

Scholarship on Christian Kabbalah is extremely limited as compared with that on Jewish Kabbalah. Apart from the odd passing reference or short article, none of the great modern Kabbalah experts have worked on Christian Kabbalah, and most of their assessments have been negative, the basic conclusion being that Christian Kabbalah was a gross distortion of Kabbalah, based on poor scholarship and often wilful misunderstanding. This negative opinion was also clearly expressed in the first important scholarly work on the subject, Joseph Leon Blau's *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*:

> It is the general theme of this book that the use of cabala by Christian thinkers was a fad of no lasting significance; that, no matter what type of interpretation was momentarily aided by cabalistic speculation, this type of speculation rapidly proved to be a blind alley. . . . Like astrology, alchemy, and other pseudo-sciences, cabala fell a legitimate victim to the development of scientific thinking.[15]

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[15] Joseph Leon Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944; reprint, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press,

In the 1960s, at the same time as Frances Yates was rewriting the historiography of magic vis-à-vis science, François Secret inaugurated a sweeping revision of interpretations of Christian Kabbalah.[16] Unfortunately for our purposes, Secret's work is primarily a chronological and geographical survey of the reception and development of Kabbalah; he does not generally offer judgments, except to note that an intellectual development as wide-ranging and influential as Christian Kabbalah cannot be unimportant for a history of ideas. Insofar as an implicit judgment can be derived from Secret, it would appear that he favors Reuchlin and the Italian Kabbalists (Francesco Zorzi, Egidius da Viterbo) over others;[17] he is wary of Agrippa, whom he accuses of a "curiosité trop charlatanesque."[18] In fact, "charlatanesque" is Secret's most common negative adjective, suggesting that for him, the extension of Christian Kabbalah into extreme realms of magic and demonology was unfortunate, a misunderstanding likely prompted by unsavory motivations.

At the same time, it is worth noting that most of the negative assessments of Christian Kabbalah depend upon a kind of comparative gradation, not logically dissimilar to the old-fashioned positivistic model of the history of science, in which early scientists were graded on their accuracy with respect to the now-known facts of natural phenomena. In particular, the common basis of the criticisms of Christian Kabbalah is that its expositors misunderstood what Kabbalah is *really* about, and instead focused most of their attention on elements marginal to if not entirely outside the purview of *true* Kabbalah. In short, Christian Kabbalists (or some of them) got it wrong, because they wasted their time on magic, numerology, and alphabetic manipulation rather than the theosophical, philosophical, contemplative core of Kabbalah.

Given our previous sketch of Kabbalistic models, it will come as no surprise that most scholarship on Christian Kabbalah has been based upon the work of Gershom Scholem, whose own assessment of the magical tendencies of Christian Kabbalah was largely negative:

1965), vii.

[16] The most important work here is François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964; revised and expanded edition (edition cited) Neully-sûr-Seine & Milan: Arma Artis & Archè, 1985).

[17] The chapter on the Italians is entitled "L'age d'or de la Kabbale Chrétienne en Italie," which together with the chapter devoted to Reuchlin takes up some thirty percent of the book: Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, 44-72 and 73-140.

[18] Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*, 162.

> Pico's and Reuchlin's writings, which placed the Kabbalah in the context of some of the leading intellectual developments of the time, attracted wide attention. They led on the one hand to considerable interest in the doctrine of Divine Names and in practical Kabbalah, and on the other hand to further speculative attempts to achieve a synthesis between kabbalistic motifs and Christian theology. The place of honor accorded to practical Kabbalah in Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim's great compendium *De Occulta Philosophia* . . . was largely responsible for the mistaken association of the Kabbalah in the Christian world with numerology and witchcraft.[19]

Based upon her reading of Scholem, Frances Yates stated that Kabbalah "was basically a method of religious contemplation which could, rather easily, pass into a kind of religious magic, though such a use of it was actually a degradation of its higher purposes."[20] Similarly, she suspects that "the genuine Hebrew Cabalist might be shocked by Agrippa's interpretation of Cabala solely as white magic. . . ."[21]

Fundamentally, there is a distinction made here between Kabbalah and magic; to the extent that a given work of Christian Kabbalah eschews the latter and is more or less accurate about the former—i.e. the *sefirot* and related theosophical concepts—that work is considered worthwhile. Agrippa's work, on the other hand, is mere compilation, however broad-ranging: "The third book of *De occulta philosophia* contains, in fact, such a great number of references to pseudo-Kabbalistic ideas [*idées prétendument kabbalistiques*] that it is appropriate to regard the book as a 'summa'" of such ideas.[22]

In the scholarly literature on early Christian Kabbalah—up to the time of Agrippa, that is—Reuchlin's is the usual model, as we have seen with Secret. Although Pico of course precedes Reuchlin, his untimely death and the confusing nature of his *900 Theses* makes it extremely difficult to determine the details of his thought on Kabbalah,[23] whereas Reuchlin's *De*

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[19] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York, London: Penguin Meridian, 1978), 198.

[20] Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979; reprint, London: ARK, 1983), 2.

[21] Yates, *Occult Philosophy*, 47.

[22] Wolf-Dieter Müller-Jahncke, "Agrippa von Nettesheim et la kabbale," in Antoine Faivre, ed. *Kabbalistes Chrétiens* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 207.

[23] Although see Wirszubski, as well as Stephen A. Farmer's far more speculative and problematic analysis, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998), particularly the Introductory Monograph, pages 1-179. Whatever the weaknesses of this analysis, this volume contains the only reliable edition of the *900 Theses*

verbo mirifico and especially *De arte cabalistica* present that thinker's version of Kabbalah at length and in a smoothly-argued fashion. The next great Christian Kabbalist, in the usual listing, would be Zorzi (Francesco Giorgi, 1466-1540), whose *De harmonia mundi* of 1525 is chock-full of various kinds of Kabbalistic speculations. Unfortunately, the size, technical vocabulary, and rarity of the volume seem to have precluded much detailed modern scholarship, and as such there is no general agreement about Zorzi's thought in general or his Kabbalah in particular. As to Agrippa himself, we have seen that the usual reading of his Kabbalah is that he mangles Jewish mysticism in favor of radical demonic magic. In essence, then, Agrippa's Kabbalah is usually compared with two models—Reuchlin's and Scholem's.

But Reuchlin's version of Kabbalah is not greatly at odds with Scholem's; that is, Reuchlin places the cosmological speculations of theosophical Kabbalah at the center of his treatment, and various forms of linguistic and numerological manipulations at the margins, serving primarily as proof-texts. In the later *De arte cabalistica*, Reuchlin's primary focus is not practical or ecstatic, and he denounces those who equate Kabbalah with magic:

> According to our [the Jews'] forbears' records, the working of miracles of this kind was so easy for Kabbalists that many spiteful cynics called them sly magicians—all as if it were not Michael who worked these deeds, but Samuel, through the medium of Egyptian spells and secret signs, and this despite the fact that the Kabbalists' wand always stays the conjurors', and that godliness works far more effectively than any deviltry. The skills of Kabbalah tend to work for the good of man, while the poison of false magic leads to their downfall.[24]

It is essential to note, furthermore, that Reuchlin Christianizes Kabbalah mainly by drawing parallels, arguing for fundamental agreement, and then

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ever compiled, along with an excellent and well-annotated translation. All references to the *Theses* in the present work use the numerical format proposed by Farmer: the first number indicates the group of theses, the second the particular thesis. The punctuation in between (period or angle brace) indicates whether the thesis in question is an "historical" thesis or one "according to my [Pico's] own opinion." Thus conclusions 28.1-47 are the Kabbalistic conclusions which relate the opinions of the Kabbalists themselves, while conclusions 11>1-72 are the "Cabalistic conclusions confirming the Christian religion," constituting Pico's synthesis of Kabbalah into his own philosophy.

[24] Johannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica* (Hagenau: Thomas Anshelm, 1517), 21^{v},S; see Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 123. The speaker in this passage is Simon, a Jewish Kabbalist.

by superadding the famous claim that the Tetragrammaton transmutes into the Pentagrammaton.[25] What does not occur in Reuchlin, so far as I can see, is a systematic rethinking of Kabbalistic premises in Christian terms. As such, modern scholars uncomfortable with the colonialist implications of a Christian appropriation of Kabbalah can grant some legitimacy to Reuchlin, in that he does not greatly alter the substance of the teachings he relates, and furthermore his necessarily limited knowledge of Jewish mystical texts ensures that *De arte cabalistica* cannot help but be simpler—and perhaps shallower—than the best of Jewish Kabbalah.

Agrippa's version of Kabbalah is quite different, though he has deep respect for Reuchlin and his work. But is it accurate to say that Agrippa's Christian Kabbalah is unfaithful to Kabbalistic thought? I suggest that, on the contrary, he simply emphasizes other sources and models—thus Yoḥanan Alemanno's magico-mystical model becomes relatively central, as it had been for Pico. Similarly, Agrippa leans more heavily on ecstatic than on theosophical sources. Taken *in toto*, Agrippa's version of Kabbalah is not in its sources or structures necessarily unfaithful to the Kabbalah available in early modern Europe, but relies on magical and ecstatic models rather than theosophical ones.

As we shall see, however, *DOP* also rethinks Kabbalah on a Christian basis, rather than simply relating Kabbalistic concepts with occasional Christian glosses. Herein lies Agrippa's "misunderstanding" of Kabbalah—he cuts it off to a great degree from its Jewish roots. Indeed, the attack in *De vanitate* denounces Kabbalah precisely because it is Jewish, because "the traitorous Jews do also affirm that Christ by this Art did oftentimes wonderful things [i.e. miracles]."[26]

> For this cause the Jews very well skilled in the names of God can work little or nothing after Christ, as their ancient Fathers were wont. But that which we prove and see, oftentimes marvelous sentences of great mysteries to be taken out of the holy Scriptures, with the revolutions (as they say) of this Art, . . .

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[25] The argument appears in Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, 79^{r}, N-O (353), and is also mentioned in Pico's *Theses* 11>14-16 (Farmer, 527), and runs something like this. The Tetragrammaton, the four-letter holiest name of God, becomes a five-letter name (the Pentagrammaton) when one of the three *mothers* (i.e. אמש) is added. Of the three mothers, *shin* ש is understood to refer to activation, realization, and perfection; as such, the Pentagrammaton made of the Tetragrammaton plus *shin* should be the Name of the Messiah. One of the possible names so generated is יהשוה, which might be pronounced something like Yesu. In other words, the true name of the Messiah, Kabbalistically determined in this manner, is Jesus.

[26] *De vanitate* 47, 100/136.

> which although sometimes they signify great mysteries, yet they can not prove, nor show any thing, but that according to the words of Gregory, we may despise them with the same facility, wherewith they be affirmed.[27]

And yet, if it is possible to speak of Christian Kabbalah as something other than a deviant form of "true" Kabbalah, a Christian Kabbalah would be one in which basic principles of Kabbalistic thought have been reinterpreted in light of Christian doctrine. By this standard, Reuchlin's Kabbalah is *not* at base Christian Kabbalah; on the other hand Agrippa's Kabbalah is equally not a gross misunderstanding of Jewish Kabbalah, but rather a coherent Christian reinterpretation. The primary reasons for rejecting such a reading are political, not systematic, based on *a priori* rejection of Christian Kabbalah as a legitimate form.

Esotericism, Occultism, and Magic

Modern scholarship on magic in the West, particularly from the Renaissance onwards, largely falls under the more general heading of "esotericism." This field is conspicuously dominated by the figure of Antoine Faivre, who succeeded François Secret in the chair of "History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe" at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris.[28] Although the majority of his analytical works are devoted to eighteenth-century materials, particularly Franz von Baader and Masonic Theosophy, several of Faivre's introductory essays elucidate general methodology and definitions.[29] In order to situate our discussion of *DOP* with respect to mystical and esoteric thought, it is worthwhile to examine these definitions closely.

Faivre's definition of esotericism is semi-phenomenological, of the type, "X must have the following components, and often has the following additional components." There are four required components: (1) a correspondence-theory of the universe, in which "symbolic and real correspondences . . . are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both

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[27] *De vanitate* 47, 101/137.

[28] To my knowledge, this is one of only two such chairs in the European and American academies, the other being Wouter Hanegraaff's at the Universiteit van Amsterdam.

[29] See, in particular, the introductory essays to *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 3-57, and to Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, eds., *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), xi-xxii. Note that the former work also contains a lengthy, slightly annotated bibliography of tremendous value for research in this field.

seen and unseen;" (2) a notion of living nature, implying both the practical application of correspondences to produce effects and the knowledge of such praxis understood as gnosis; (3) "imagination and mediations," which is to say that the imagination and memory interact with mediating structures (Faivre lists "rituals, symbolic images, mandalas, intermediary spirits") to contact the divine and develop gnosis; and finally (4) the "experience of transmutation," in which the esoteric practitioner is utterly transformed by and for the gnosis in question, such that in alchemy for instance there can be "no separation between knowledge (gnosis) and inner experience, or intellectual activity and active imagination if we want to turn lead into silver or silver into gold."[30]

Each of these four components must be present, according to Faivre, before we may call some system of thought "esotericism." More specifically, each can be understood to distinguish esotericism from some other mode of thought, such that with all four present, the system can be nothing other than esoteric. In particular, the correspondences distinguish an esoteric system from one based on "the principles of noncontradiction and excluded middle of linear causality," and living nature distinguishes it from a scientific or monist one. The idea of "imagination and mediations" distinguishes esotericism from mysticism:

> In somewhat oversimplified terms, we could say that the mystic . . . aspires to the more or less complete suppression of images and intermediaries because for him they become obstacles to the union with God. While the esoterist appears to take more interest in the intermediaries revealed to his inner eye through the power of his creative imagination than to extend himself essentially toward the union with the divine. He prefers to sojourn on Jacob's ladder where angels (and doubtless other entities as well) climb up and down, rather than to climb to the top and beyond.[31]

Transmutation is in some respects formally different from the other three components, in that a system with the other three elements present, but lacking the experience of transmutation, "would hardly exceed the limits of a form of speculative spirituality."[32] In effect, it is transmutation, in the sense of initiation (especially ritual initiation) into gnosis which marks esoteric thought as a distinctive modality.

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[30] Faivre, *Access*, 10-13.
[31] Faivre, *Access*, 12.
[32] Faivre, *Access*, 13.

The two remaining more or less optional components are (5) "the praxis of concordance," i.e. the theory that there is a truth behind all truths, or a religion behind all religions, such that the practice of establishing common denominators among several systems is understood to produce illumination; and (6) an emphasis on transmission, which "implies that an esoteric teaching can or must be transmitted from master to disciple following a preestablished channel, respecting a previously marked path."[33]

There are several grave methodological problems with this sort of definition, as should already be apparent from the critiques of Mircea Eliade's work over the last few decades. In particular, Faivre falls into the dangerous trap of exclusivity: in order to avoid anachronism and what in other spheres have been called "category mistakes," he asks that scholars refrain either from treating esotericism as something else or, conversely, from treating systems that are not really esoteric as esotericism.

> . . . [I]t behooves us to use the word "esotericism" wisely. We should not consider it a bearer of a spiritual or semantic value that it does not contain in itself. . . . We should extricate it, if possible from the recuperators, scholarly or otherwise. . . . The approach proposed here translates thus a twofold concern. On the one hand, to have differences respected; on the other hand, to carry empirical research, without ideological apriori, of transversal pathways and converging byways. . . . Let us preserve this term so suitable for denoting an ensemble of cultural and religious realities, which a family resemblance seems to bind together sufficiently to authorize our making them a field of study.[34]

Faivre's exclusivity is both naive and potentially damaging to future scholarship. The valorization of "empirical research, without ideological apriori" presumes that such research is possible, where precisely the contrary has been argued by half a century of historians and philosophers—I am thinking here not only of so-called postmodern theorists but also of hermeneutic thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur. Furthermore, one should always beware of methodological precepts that close off or prevent particular sorts of questions and analyses, most especially when we are told that these precepts are dictated by the needs of "empirical research" and the authority of "a field of study."

But the conjunction of the call for "respect for difference" with the demand that we "not consider it a bearer of a spiritual or semantic value that

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[33] Faivre, *Access*, 14.
[34] Faivre, *Access*, 19.

it does not contain in itself" points to a deeper problem, endemic to this sort of phenomenology, i.e. essentialism. The definition in six parts which we have already discussed is, for Faivre, a fairly accurate catalogue of the components of esotericism *as it really is*. Esotericism is here understood to be *sui generis*, to use Eliade's infamous phrase; in other words, it cannot be compared to other phenomena, but must be understood on its own grounds.

One should not think that Faivre is unaware of these problems. He is well-versed in the scholarship of the History of Religions, in which at one time such terms as "essentialism", "*sui generis*", and "category mistake" were employed like mantras. Why, then, does Faivre fall into so many of the same traps as did Eliade? The answer is actually quite simple: not unlike Eliade with religion, Faivre really believes that esotericism *is sui generis*, that it *cannot* be compared to other phenomena, because he thinks that true esoteric thought is the path by which modern humanity can escape or remedy its fallen spiritual condition.

> It is no accident . . . if human sciences like anthropology, history of religions, etc., are open to esotericism and vice versa. Pico della Mirandola's *Discourse* on human "dignity" has once more become an actuality. It is incumbent on humanity to engage in continuous redefinition to discover or rediscover its place within Nature and within a universal culture and society. The magisterial work of Mircea Eliade . . . responds well to this double demand of culture and universality. According to him the first demand represents today the indispensable detour for entering into any "initiation" worthy of the name. The second, understood as the intelligence of differences as much as resemblances, is as removed from narrow historicism as from artificial universalism, abstract or disincarnate. No exclusivism either, in that corpus, which gives to esoteric currents the place they deserve.[35]

Again,

> Einstein said that science was not made to give flavor to the soup. The knowledge of Boehme and his brothers in theosophy [here particularly von Baader] is not only destined to *give* the flavor to the soup, but to make us *taste* it, a project that seems . . . to signify an always healthy and perpetual return to participation on all planes, including that of the tangible; the plane that

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[35] Faivre, *Access*, 108, referring to Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, trans. Alf Hiltebeitel and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) and *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

> abstraction quickly causes us to forget, or even deny—the only one, in any case, that permits us to rediscover the absolute identity between the Man of Knowledge and the Man of Desire.[36]

What can one do if, like myself, one is deeply suspicious of a scholarly project rooted in a concealed religious project, particularly when the technique of concealment involves hypocritical claims to "empirical research, without ideological apriori?" The simple solution, of course, would be to discard Faivre's methodology and definition entirely. But, as with Eliade—or Frances Yates for that matter—this would mean discarding gold along with the dross. My own preference is to keep the definition, subject to revision of course, and shift its grounds from some idealized "real esotericism" to the equally arcane world of academic methodology and theory. In other words, we simply take the definition to apply to a category, constructed by and for academics interested in such subjects, which enables analysis and comparison; conversely, any and all of the components may be set aside when they cease to be enabling.

The advantage of retaining the definition in this manner is that it enables comparisons by providing a series of interesting and complex criteria. If two phenomena are found to possess the four "required" components, for example, we have some sense of where to begin analysis—with questions which relate to the general problem of esotericism and which serve to differentiate the two systems within that context; thus far, I think, Faivre would agree. But if it can be established that one system is esotericism according to the definition, and another is *like* esotericism but lacks some particular component, then again we have found a crack into which to insert

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[36] Faivre, "Faith and Knowledge in Franz von Baader and in Modern Gnosis," in *Access*, 133. Faivre also shows his theosophical project clearly in *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy* (Albany: SUNY, 1993) and *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1995); both books extrapolate philosophical, or rather theosophical, concepts from mythological evidence, with the more or less explicit intention that readers work to bring these myths into their lives. A similar project informs the work of Faivre's disciple Joscelyn Godwin; see for example *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: The Spiritual Dimension of Music from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987); *The Harmony of the Spheres: A Sourcebook of the Pythagorean Tradition* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1993); and *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY, 1994).

Note that Faivre's and Godwin's adherence to esoteric ideals does not make their work worthless, only that one should be cautious; I do not think either scholar knowingly cants his analyses to promote esotericism as such, and I have analyzed Faivre's thought in detail precisely because it is extremely valuable. By contrast, there is (still) a considerable semi-scholarly literature on esoteric or occult history produced by scientistic or positivistic writers whose ideological presuppositions entail the uselessness of their pseudo-scholarship.

our analytical wedge: what differences are effected by this difference, by this presence on the one hand and absence on the other?

The present analysis of *DOP* is not comparative; as such, I shall not propose major alterations to Faivre's definition. Instead, I make periodic use of his six categories to elucidate patterns of ideas in *DOP*. Future scholarship must determine, as a comparative endeavor, the extent to which the category of esotericism is usefully applied to Agrippa, and to early modern magic more generally.

Ritual Magic

In previous chapters, I have used various sources as conversation partners for Agrippa. Thus we have used Ficino's natural magic to clarify Agrippa's, and linguistic theories of writing to give us a vocabulary and a set of questions with which to explicate Agrippa's semiotics. In this chapter, discussions of Kabbalah and esotericism serve a similar function, and the primary purpose of the present section is to explicate some aspects of modern ritual theory which will be of value for understanding Agrippa's approach to ritual magic.

At the same time, I have an additional purpose in discussing ritual theory. Not only do I want to show that Agrippa's theory of ritual is complex and interesting, but I contend that a theoretical extrapolation from it will be of more general utility and applicability in the field of ritual studies. In other words, I think that *DOP*'s theory of ritual—updated and expanded to cover a wider range of materials—will be a useful addition to the toolbox of the scholar of ritual.

In order to make this case efficiently, I have selected a single modern theory of ritual to represent a larger class of such theories; specifically, I use Stanley Jeyarajah Tambiah's famous "performative approach" to explicate both the "symbolic" approach[37] to ritual and its problems.

To put it very broadly, the symbolists eschew a tight linkage between ritual and social function, and focus instead on the ways in which ritual can be understood as linguistic performance. In contrast to the loose analogies between ritual and language drawn by such thinkers as Radcliffe-Brown and

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[37] Insofar as these theorists have a "school" to which they adhere, they are called "symbolists," "culturalists," or even worse "symbolic-culturalists." On this school in general, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61-92; note however that Bell discusses Tambiah in the previous chapter on functional structuralism: Bell, *Ritual*, 50-51.

Eliade, the analyses of the symbolists employ concepts from linguistics and semiotics in a relatively sophisticated manner. But semiotics is not a "quick fix" for ritual; indeed, ritual theories which grow out of linguistic theories inherit the flaws and fallacies of their parent discipline, as I shall demonstrate using Tambiah as a case in point.

In Tambiah's "performative approach" to ritual and magic,[38] largely derived from John Austin's speech-act theory, magic—which Tambiah understands to be simply a kind of ritual—is analyzed as a form of communication. Further, this communicative action is like Austin's illocutionary speech—the communicative act is itself the conclusion rather than a proposition. In short, saying is doing.[39] In the brief analysis that follows, I want to question two central constructs of Tambiah's theory which, I think, are widely accepted among a broad class of ritual theorists. In both cases, it is questions raised in earlier chapters of the present work that give the initial impetus to criticism.

First, the notion that ritual is "communication" generally presumes implicitly that normative communication is spoken. As we have seen from Agrippa's mathematical magic, however, it is possible to construct a magical theory of language and semiotics which presumes that normative communication is written. If rituals (and especially so-called magical ones) are analyzed as written communication, a good deal of ritual theory requires extensive revision.

Second, the problem of falsification: if a magical act is supposed to produce some effect, and if, so far as the outside observer can discern, the act has no mechanism by which to do so, why does magic not die out? How can

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[38] Stanley Jeyarajah Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man*, n.s. 3 (1968), 175-208; "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts," in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-69; and *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[39] Stock examples here are such speech-acts as christening a ship, or saying (in the appropriate cultural context) "I now pronounce you man and wife." The speech-act accomplishes the end—the couple are married. Illocutionary communication thus differs from other locutive modes in that the audience for the speech-act need not be *convinced* of the validity of the argument. Paul Ricoeur nicely summarizes the three aspects of discourse in this sense: "The act of speaking . . . is constituted by a hierarchy of subordinate acts which are distributed on three levels: (1) the level of the locutionary or propositional act, the act *of* saying; (2) the level of the illocutionary act or force, that which we do *in* saying; and (3) the level of the perlocutionary act, that which we do *by* saying:" Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 199.

intelligent people believe that their magic will have effects when this claim is so clearly falsifiable? Tambiah does not answer this question; instead, he uses speech-act theory to prevent it—one cannot ask whether a ritual *works*, only what and how it *communicates*. Agrippa's approach to natural magic vis-à-vis skepticism, however, suggests a perspective from which a given ritual or magical practice might apparently fail utterly without this fact's in any way contradicting the validity of the practice.

Ritual Communication

Let me begin with Tambiah's definition of ritual:

> Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition). Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the third sense of indexical values . . . being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance.[40]

These peculiar characteristics of ritual as opposed to "ordinary" communication are entailed by the secondary communicative character of ritual, its nature as a representation or imitation of ordinary communication. In essence, Tambiah elides all communicative functions (including ritual) into one broad group, and then treats ritual as merely a somewhat unusual example from this group:

> Now, if for the purposes of exposition we draw a crude distinction between 'ordinary' communicational behaviour and 'ritual' behaviour (accepting of course that both kinds are equally subject to cultural conventions), then we could say (forgetting the problem of insincerity and lying) that ordinary acts 'express' attitudes and feelings directly (e.g. crying denotes distress in our society) and 'communicate' that information to interacting persons (e.g. the person crying wishes to convey to another his feeling of distress). But ritualized, conventionalized, stereotyped behavior is constructed in order to express and communicate, and is publicly construed as expressing and

[40] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 119.

> communicating, certain attitudes congenial to an ongoing institutionalized intercourse. Stereotyped conventions in this sense act at a second or further remove; they code not intentions but 'simulations' of intentions.[41]

In other words "ordinary" communication represents "attitudes and feelings," while ritual communication represents representation. Tambiah suggests that this secondary character of ritual has a purpose: it is not that ritual is "bad speech," but rather that the limitations placed on ritual as communication enable it to communicate a broader sense of structure and order:

> Rituals as conventionalized behaviour are not designed or meant to express the intentions, emotions, and states of mind of individuals in a direct, spontaneous, and 'natural' way. Cultural elaboration of codes consists in the *distancing* from such spontaneous and intentional expressions because spontaneity and intentionality are, or can be, contingent, labile, circumstantial, even incoherent or disordered.[42]

A reader of the present work will immediately have noticed the hint of writing in this "representation of a representation" formulation, which sounds suspiciously like Saussure or Jakobson in their attacks on writing. Let us be clear about Tambiah's logocentrism:

> Thus *distancing* is the other side of the coin of conventionality; distancing separates the private emotions of the actors from their commitment to a public morality. In a positive sense, it enables the cultural elaboration of the symbolic; but in a negative sense it also contributes to hypocrisy, and the subversion of transparent honesty.[43]

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[41] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 124. In passing, it is worth noting Tambiah's parenthetical "forgetting the problem of insincerity and lying." One is reminded at once of Jacques Derrida's brilliant assault on John R. Searle's neo-Austinian semiotics, in which Derrida noted Searle's presumption that a theory of language need not take into account insincerity, dishonesty, or humor, and pointed out that such exclusions eliminate a great deal of what makes language a human phenomenon. The Searle-Derrida debate took place in *Glyph* v. 1 and 2 (1977); Derrida's essays have been reprinted, along with a summary of Searle's essay and an afterword by Derrida, in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). In the same context, it is worth considering Umberto Eco's dictum that "semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie," *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976; reprint, Midland Books, 1979), 6ff. *et passim.* In a sense, one might argue that Tambiah's entire approach falls to the ground on the basis of this parenthetical exclusion, because by "forgetting the problem of insincerity and lying" he makes unworkable the parallel between ritual and language.

[42] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 124. Emphasis in the original.

[43] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 124.

I would like to propose a written solution to the problem of ritual—that ritual communication can be understood as writing, and further is often *better* understood as writing. Given the necessary brevity of the present discussion, I cannot formulate all the possible details and ramifications of such a written theory. Instead, I would like to use *DOP* to make this demonstration: my analysis of *DOP*'s ritual magic will combine *DOP*'s writing-dominated semiotics with this theory of ritual as writing. Insofar as this theoretical basis brings to light interesting and valuable conclusions, about *DOP* and about ritual, I hope that I will have demonstrated the potential worth of a written theory of ritual. For the moment, let me simply sketch one possible direction for such a theory, and then move directly on to *DOP*'s ritual magic.

The Problem of Falsification

The problem of falsification is one of the oldest questions in the historiography of magic: why does the magician (or the magician's audience) not notice that the magic materially fails to operate? As we saw in chapter one, there are numerous classic answers to this question, from Frazer's magician-as-illusionist theory to Malinowski's theory of magic as catharsis.

Tambiah's suggestion is that the magic *does* operate, but that the operation is linguistic rather than material. Specifically, he proposes that rituals operate in a linguistic sphere, more or less mapped upon the material sphere but not its equivalent; thus while there may be material effects *described by* the linguistic operations of ritual, one should not assume that the ritual is supposed by the natives to cause those effects materially. In other words, ritual affects the linguistic, semiotic, discursive sphere, in ways which usually parallel the material effects rhetorically ascribed to the ritual; this parallelism, and the natives' awareness of it, should not be taken to mean that the natives think the ritual has material effects. Since discursive efficacy is not commonly demonstrable by the anthropologist, and material efficacy has been divorced from the efficacy of the ritual *per se*, it is impossible to say whether a given ritual "works" or not.

As a privileged case in point, Tambiah identifies in native theories about word-magic:

> three notions which form an interrelated set: deities or first ancestors or their equivalents instituted speech and the classifying activity; man himself is the

> creator and user of this propensity; finally, language as such has an independent existence and has the power to influence reality.[44]

Tambiah notes an old theory of magic as based on a non-recognition of the arbitrary character of language, and it is this theory he proposes to uproot:

> And if it can be demonstrated that primitive magic is based on true relational metaphorical thinking we shall explode the classical theory which postulates that magic is based on the belief in a real identity between word and thing. The basic fallacy of linguists and philosophers who search for the origins of the magical attitude to words is their prior assumption and acceptance that the primitive has in fact such an attitude. . . . It would perhaps have been safer for the linguists to have held fast to their knowledge of how language works and to have questioned whether anthropologists had correctly reported primitive thought.[45]

I do not question Tambiah's success in finding "true relational metaphorical thinking" in the cultures he analyzes; like him, I think it would be strange indeed if he did not find such thinking. At the same time, Tambiah has fallen into a fallacy as deep as (if perhaps safer than) that into which the "linguists and philosophers" fell. If the "classical theory" postulates a distinction between "true" metaphorical thinking and "the denotative fallacy" of confusing metaphorical relations for ontological identities, Tambiah upholds this distinction by denying that natives could possibly think that way. For him, this is a defense of the natives—they do not think in such a "primitive" fashion. I suggest that Tambiah's approach is more generous but no less misguided than that of his predecessors: the natives, by which I mean human beings in general, most certainly do think in this "primitive" way. Where both Tambiah and his predecessors go wrong is in thinking that the denotative fallacy is something we moderns have gotten past. For Tambiah's straw men (Ogden and Richards, Izutsu, Cassirer), the natives think this way, therefore they are primitive and superstitious; for Tambiah, the natives are not primitive or superstitious, therefore they do not think this way.

As we have seen with Agrippa, however, one need not be primitive or superstitious to consider the possibility of signs ontologically attached to their referents. On the contrary, one can perhaps argue that Tambiah's theory presumes an ontological connection between the *producer* and the

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[44] Tambiah, "Power of Words," 184.
[45] Tambiah, "Power of Words," 188.

sign, a more subtle but no less dangerous superstition. If we suppose instead, as did early modern linguistic thinkers, that written signs stand more or less autonomous with respect to both producer and referent, but that under certain circumstances this autonomy can be attenuated (e.g. a photograph vs. a stick-figure), then we have the basis of a written semiotic. If we further apply this to ritual "language," we produce a number of surprising effects.

First, ritual actors—priests, dancers, participant-audience, etc.—are *normally* distinct from the parts, roles, and meanings which they express bodily and vocally. That is, the stereotyped or conventional character of ritual behavior does not constitute a disjuncture between ritual communication and the "ordinary" mode (here the written), but a continuity. Conversely, the entirety of the ritual's audience, which also includes all the participants, must be understood as interpreters, as readers, who interact with the text in a more or less distant and abstract fashion: the text is autonomous.

Second, the continual drive towards accuracy of repetition, the desire to perform the ritual just the way one's ancestors did, appears as a necessary artifact of the non-physicality of ritual's medium. To put it more simply, writing in the ordinary sense is impressed upon a physical, lasting medium, such as paper, wood, bone, stone, metal. Without any necessary intervention by human actors (except negatively, to avoid destroying the book), the text will survive indefinitely. Ritual, however, is written in a medium (people, objects, spoken words, actions) which is not physically lasting; as such, it is incumbent upon knowledgeable practitioners, as librarians of ritual texts, to preserve the texts *without alteration.* Ritual stereotypy and repetition neatly parallels the Brahminical memorization arts, by which semi-oral texts are subdivided, despite an apparent loss of meaning, precisely in order to *preserve* meaning.

Third, in the ordinary course of culture ritual tends to become ontologized, to be treated as a singular object rather than a series of discrete and distinct performances. Insofar as we think of ritual as parallel to speech, this is quite surprising, or at least requires explanation: we do not normally refer to others' speech-acts as objects; when we do so, it is generally in a special context—the christening of a ship, the pronouncing of vows. If ritual is treated as written text, however, this again becomes an expected characteristic: we do not usually refer to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* as though the author were simply speaking to us, changing his mind unpredictably along the way; on the contrary, we treat the book as a Text, a Book, an

object separate from the author. Just so Mass is Mass, a Christening a Christening, a Bris a Bris; the specific actors and details are irrelevant.[46]

Let me make a final point, which will become clearer over the course of the analysis of *DOP*'s ritual magic. Tambiah, as noted above, equates magic with ritual. At the same time, he makes certain qualifications to this equation that call into question its entire basis. The most striking such qualification is in Tambiah's assessment of divination:

> Obviously such ritual enactments as various forms of divination, astrological consultations, mediumistic sessions do not predict their outcomes in advance, yet their ordering is so different from the uncertainties of a game. For they have as their aim the enabling of the client to effect a cure or a reconciliation, to make a decision, to avoid a danger, and in this sense the object of the exercise is to make a fruitful exchange between the occult and the human via the mediation of the officiant, a fruitful conjunction that will help to produce an orderly ongoing social existence.[47]

Having argued that magic and rituals are in essence rigged games, appearing undecided and in doubt while in fact not open to differences, Tambiah goes on to tell us that a primary form of magical behavior—divination—must be excluded from the category, precisely because the outcome is indeed in doubt. Or rather, he continues, because ritual is necessarily predetermined, it *must be the case* that the divinatory, "finding-out" aspect of divination is not important—what is important is that the client and the diviner have a nice chat which makes the client feel better!

Allow me to point out the simplicity of a written solution: the diviner is a professional reader. Random chance—defined culturally as god, gods, spirits, nature, the dead—produces a complex sign, of whose interpretation the client probably has very little knowledge. The reader, using a culturally determined canon of interpretive techniques, texts, images, and myths, reads the text, taking into account what he or she knows of the client's situation. In a way, it is surprising that this theory has not been proposed before, given that every Western form of divination known to me uses the terminology of "reading."

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[46] Of course this is not at all true anthropologically: it is certainly of value to the social scientist to be able to see the ways in which a given ritual is *not* the same from performance to performance. But this is only interesting if continuity and similarity are ordinarily presumed; it would be peculiar indeed for an anthropologist to attempt a demonstration of important differences between Catholic Mass and Micronesian canoe-building.

[47] Tambiah, "Performative Approach," 119.

Ritual, Belief, and Secrecy

Ritual or ceremonial magic is the focus of Book III; unfortunately, as should be clear from our discussions of "magic" and "ritual," it is unclear what exactly "ritual magic" would mean. *DOP* provides a number of definitions, as does *De vanitate*, and before turning to the main body of Book III some explication of definitions is in order.

The first definition in *DOP* is in Book I, chapter 2, on kinds of magic, and gives a general outline:

> Now theological philosophy, or divinity, teacheth what God is, what the mind, what an intelligence, what an angel, what a devil, what the soul, what religion, what sacred institutions, rites, temples, observations, and sacred mysteries are: it instructs us also concerning faith, miracles, the virtues of words and figures, the secret operations and mysteries of seals, and as Apuleius saith, it teacheth us rightly to understand, and to be skilled in the ceremonial laws, the equity of holy things, and rule of religions.[48]

Two more definitions appear in chapters 45-46 of *De vanitate*, on "Goetia" and "Theurgy:"[49]

> Now the parts of ceremonial magic are goetia and theurgy.
>
> Goetia is unfortunate, by the commerces of unclean spirits made up of the rites of wicked curiosities, unlawful charms, and deprecations, and is abandoned and execrated by all laws. . . .
>
> And all these [practitioners of goetia] proceed two ways. For some endeavor to call and compel evil spirits, adjuring by a certain power, especially of divine names. . . . [T]here are [also] some that are most impiously wicked indeed, that submit themselves to devils, sacrifice to, and adore them, and thereby become guilty of idolatry, and the basest abasement: to which crimes if the former are not obnoxious, yet they expose themselves to manifest dangers. For even compelled devils always deceive us whithersoever they go.[50]

> Now many think that theurgy is not unlawful, as if this be governed by good angels, and a divine deity, when as yet oftentimes it is under the names of God, and the fallacies of evil angels obstringed by the wicked fallacies of the devils.

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[48] *DOP* I:2, 87-88/6.

[49] In early modern magic, "theurgy" generally means the manipulation of angels and angelic celestial beings.

[50] *De vanitate* 45, 94-95130-31.

> For we do procure, and attract not by natural powers only, but also by certain rites, and ceremonies, celestials, and by them divine virtues to ourselves; of which together with many rules the ancient magicians did treat in many volumes.[51]

There are in addition three important definitions early in Book III; the first, appearing in the dedicatory epistle to Archbishop Hermann von Wied, explains and defends the general purpose and function of ceremonial magic[52] as follows:

> But the knowledge of the divine science, doth only and very powerfully perform this for us. When we by the remembrance of its majesty being always busied in divine studies do every moment contemplate divine things, by a sage and diligent inquisition, and by all the degrees of the creatures ascending even to the Archetype himself, do draw from him the infallible virtue of all things, which those that neglect, trusting only to natural and worldly things, are wont often to be confounded by divers errors and fallacies, and very oft to be deceived by evil spirits; but the understanding of divine things purgeth the mind from errors, and rendereth it divine, giveth infallible power to our works, and driveth far the deceits and obstacles of all evil spirits, and together subjects them to our commands. Yea, it compels even good angels and all the powers of the world unto our service, viz. the virtue of our works being drawn from the Archetype himself, to whom when we ascend, all creatures necessarily obey us, and all the quire of heaven do follow us. . . .[53]

Finally in Book III, chapter 3, there are the following statements:

> Therefore it is meet that we who endeavour to attain to so great a height should especially meditate of two things: first, how we should leave carnal affections, frail sense, and material passions; secondly, by what way and means we may ascend to an intellect pure and conjoined with the powers of the gods, without which we shall never happily ascend to the scrutiny of secret things, and to the power of wonderful workings, or miracles; for in these dignification consists wholly, which nature, desert, and a certain religious art do make up.[54]

> [There are] . . . certain religious ceremonies. . . . by which the character of the divine virtue and power is stamped on us which they call the divine consent, by which a man supported with the divine nature, and made as it were a

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[51] *De vanitate* 46, 97/134.

[52] There is no need to distinguish between "ceremonial magic" and "religious magic" in *DOP*; both terms occur, the former far more often, and they appear to be equivalent.

[53] *DOP* III:e.d., 399/435.

[54] *DOP* III:3, 407/448; chapter not in W.

> companion of the angels, beareth the ingrafted power of God; and this rite is referred to the ecclesiastical mysteries. . . . [And by these means] thou shalt be able by praying, consecrating, sacrificing, invocating, to attract spiritual and celestial powers, and to imprint them on those things thou pleasest, and by it to vivify every magical work. . . .[55]

We cannot as yet explicate these definitions in any detailed fashion. A few points are clear: First, ritual magic correctly performed elevates the magician "even to the Archetype himself." Second, this same magic enables the magician to command all creatures, even the angels, and to work wonders or miracles in a divinely approved fashion. Third, practitioners of ritual magic often slip into diabolism and traffic with the infernal—demonic magic in the usual (non-Agrippan) sense. In the present section, we shall learn both why ritual magic is so potentially superior and holy, and how it can so easily go bad.

Secrecy and Initiation

Immediately after these definitions, *DOP* moves on to the issue of secrecy.

> Whosoever therefore thou art that now desirest to study this science, keep silent and constantly conceal within the secret closets of your religious breast, so holy a determination; for (as Mercurius [Trismegistus] says), to publish to the knowledge of many a speech thoroughly filled with so great majesty of the deity, is a sign of an irreligious spirit; and divine Plato commanded, that holy and secret mysteries should not be divulged to the people; Pythagoras also, and Porphyry consecrated their followers to a religious silence; Orpheus also, with a certain terrible authority of religion did exact an oath of silence from those he did initiate to the ceremonies of holy things.[56]

Later in the same chapter, we read the following somewhat different injunction:

> Wherefore you will pardon me, if I pass over in silence many and the chiefest secret mysteries of ceremonial magic. I suppose I shall do enough, if I open those things which are necessary to be known, and you by the reading of this book go not away altogether empty of these mysteries; but on that condition let these things be communicated to you, on which Dionysius bound Timothy, that they which perceive these secrets, would not expose them to

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[55] *DOP* III:3, 408/449; chapter not in W.
[56] *DOP* III:2, 403/443.

> the unworthy, but gather them together amongst wise men, and keep them with that reverence that is due to them.[57]

Secrecy is a common problem in magical texts; indeed, magical literature is peppered with esoteric (in the simple sense) tropes. Several major types of secrecy, in two general classes, may be distinguished in *DOP*, and are fairly representative of the broader literature.

First, in the latter of the two quoted passages, *DOP* describes itself as filled with secrets that can only be discovered by the wise, a claim repeated in the conclusion of the entire work:

> For we have delivered this art in such a manner, that it may not be hid from the prudent and intelligent, and yet may not admit wicked and incredulous men to the mysteries of these secrets, but leave them destitute and astonished, in the shade of ignorance and desperation.[58]

Here the "prudent and intelligent" can be understood as a twofold group. On the one hand, there are the initiates, whose prior knowledge of the relevant mysteries enables them to discern the truth hidden in the text. On the other hand, there are those sufficiently knowledgeable, wise, and reverent to discover the truth, but who have not yet been initiated; the implication is that this latter group will *become* initiated by means of their reading of *DOP*.

Second, as in the first definition quoted, there is the injunction to the wise, whether previously initiated or initiated by study of *DOP*, not to reveal the truths they discover. This can be understood as a necessary corollary to the notion of *DOP* as an initiatory text: those who become "the wise" through its study need to recognize the responsibilities attendant upon their new-found status.

Such a rhetoric of hiddenness and initiation is extremely common in magical texts, which has led to a tendency by certain scholars to equate magic with esotericism. This move is parallel to Evans-Pritchard's with respect to witchcraft (see page 6 above), in that it shifts magical activity into the realm of the social, where it is more obviously subject to sociological and anthropological analysis. While the parallels between *DOP*'s rhetoric of secrecy and that of initiation cults are certainly noteworthy, however, there are also interesting differences that require discussion.

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[57] *DOP* III:2, 406/444; passage not in W.
[58] *DOP* III:65, 599/677; passage not in W.

First, the idea of auto-initiation by means of a text is striking. One possible implication is a hermeneutics of authorial intent: if close study of the text can make the author—himself an initiate—present to the reader, then the reader can receive initiation under the guidance of a master.

A more complex reading, and one which accords better with the semiotics we have seen in Book II, is that the author is no less present in the text than he would be in person; indeed, he may be *more* present, given *DOP*'s tendency to privilege written media. As such the hermeneutic theory implied here is not so much naive as cynical about the value of face-to-face communication.

My sense is that this latter reading requires yet further complication. In chapter one above (see page 19), I mentioned Paul Ricoeur's notion of a "world in front of the text," which I have employed in a manner not entirely consistent with what I take to be Ricoeur's meaning. In particular, I have throughout attempted to present *DOP*'s understanding and analysis of a world not the same as our own, a world in which the various metaphysical principles discussed in *DOP* are accepted essentially at face value. The present examination of the idea of secrecy and initiation, however, suggests that the focus on a world in front of *DOP* is not only a methodological decision on my part, but also a precondition of *DOP*'s argument.

Let me clarify. A reader engages in a circular process—the hermeneutic circle—of entering the text and then returning with meaning. The basic hermeneutical problem, however, is that the meaning so generated is not equivalent to some absolute "meaning of the text"; that is, two different readers will construct two different meanings from the same text. As Ricoeur puts it rather nicely, "With written discourse, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. . . . Not that we can conceive of a text without an author; the tie between the speaker and the discourse is not abolished, but distended and complicated."[59] This has a great many philosophical ramifications. To summarize those of particular relevance here: (1) no text has an absolute and fixed meaning; therefore (2) the author of the text does not control what meaning the reader derives from it—the author of a text is absent, not present; (3) the ground upon which the reader engages with the text is not the world *of* the text but rather a world projected

[59] Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 200-01. Note that this formulation grants normativity to speech and restricts writing to transcription; thus writing is more *distant* that speech—Ricoeur refers to "this dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention. . . ." The reader of the present work will not need warning that Agrippa's formulation could not possibly agree with Ricoeur's.

in front of it; therefore (4) the text under analysis is, in some sense, a text projected by the reader.

"Discourse . . . is what refers to the world, to *a* world. In spoken discourse this means that what the dialogue ultimately refers to is the *situation* common to the interlocutors."[60] Therefore the text can only point to some world in front of the text, a world in whose creation the reader participates as a dominant factor. An alternative construction, however, would suggest that spoken discourse is *limited* to a specific world, the world of the interlocutors; as such, it can fail to refer effectively, in that the interlocutors might disagree entirely about what worlds are legitimate objects of discourse. Written texts, on the other hand, are unfettered by the bonds of the now, indeed by the bonds of reality. As such, *DOP* can refer validly and coherently to a world whose characteristics do not match any world described by modern science without thereby being designated a "fantasy." On the contrary, the absence of an authorial presence entails that it is the duty of the *reader* to move toward the projected world in front of the text and not simply dismiss the text. To the extent that the reader can formulate the world in which the text is most fully meaningful, it is perhaps arguable that the text has succeeded in projecting (one of) its meaning(s):

> . . . [W]hat we understand first in a discourse is not another person, but a project, that is, the outline of a new being-in-the-world. Only writing, in freeing itself, not only from its author, but from the narrowness of the dialogical situation, reveals this destination of discourse as projecting a world.[61]

Although the terminology is modern, these principles were known to Renaissance thinkers in the same way, and from the same sources, as they knew about the arbitrary nature of the sign. Given *DOP*'s sophistication with regard to the sign, we cannot suppose that problems of text and reader are dealt with simplistically; what is more, the theory of analog signification in Book II must be taken into account when trying to understand the hermeneutics of Book III.

We have seen that the various injunctions to secrecy imply that a reader of *DOP* can become initiated through its study. Furthermore we know from Book II that a sign can be motivated to such a degree that it has a dominating or controlling effect on the world, and we learned in Book I that

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[60] Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 201.
[61] Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 202.

human minds may be dominated or controlled in this way. What is implied here is that *DOP* is itself a sufficiently powerful sign that it can control its readers and impose initiation upon them; in other words, the reader is forced to understand in a certain way, such that the meaning derived from reading the text is fixed.[62]

Nevertheless *DOP* does not seem to have this effect on *all* readers, but only on the "wise." This leads to an extremely important conclusion: the power of a magical sign to affect a human mind is dependent on that mind's understanding of the sign.

We have already seen one example of this in our discussion of hieroglyphs (page 127). Hieroglyphs were understood as priestly, secret writing, comprehensible only to the initiated. An Egyptian priest, immensely well educated about all things sacred, would look at the *ouroboros* hieroglyph and understand at once the complex notion of the universe compressed into it. Most importantly for our present discussion, the priest need not already know this particular sign to understand it, for he can derive its meaning from his knowledge of allegorical interpretation, animals, divinity, and so forth. A layperson, however, would be unable to make such a leap of interpretation, not having the foundation of knowledge required. The magical power of the sign to project its meaning thus depends upon the interpreter's prior initiation.

Secrecy and Superstition

This hermeneutical understanding of the injunctions to secrecy aid considerably in understanding the first portion of Book III, particularly chapters 2 through 13, which link secrecy with belief, faith, and operative power:

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[62] This construction of written signs is at odds with Ricoeur's formulation that the "material fixation" of discourse—for him the main purpose of writing—requires us to "concede that the perlocutionary act is the least inscribable aspect of discourse and that by preference it characterises spoken language" (Ricoeur, "Model of the Text," 199-200). At base, Ricoeur's assumption is that writing's function is to fix spoken discourse in a material form, which implies that writing is dominated by the locutionary and to a lesser degree the illocutionary, while the perlocutionary remains outside writing's normal sphere. Given the directions in which *DOP* has led us, we must admit that this assumption can be challenged. Ricoeur's assumption can be rephrased in entirely logocentric terms: he thinks that writing's function is limited to the transcription of speech. But if writing can have functions and effects not coterminous with the structure of speech-acts, it must equally be granted that writing may have perlocutionary (or per-grammatical) function, power, and force.

> [E]ven as the divine powers detest public things and profane, and love secrecy; so every magical experiment fleeth the public, seeks to be hid, is strengthened by silence, but is destroyed by publication, neither doth any complete effect follow after; all these things suffer loss, when they are poured into prating and incredulous minds; therefore it behoveth a magical operator, if he would get fruit from this art, to be secret, and to manifest to none, neither his work nor place, nor time, neither his desire nor will, unless either to a master, or partner, or companion, who also ought to be faithful, believing, silent, and dignified by nature and education: seeing that even the prating of a companion, his incredulity and unworthiness, hindereth and disturbeth the effect in every operation.[63]

This discussion of secrecy, belief and credulity reaches its peak in chapter 4, which treats "Of the two helps of ceremonial magic, religion and superstition."[64] The distinction between these two is simple enough: "All worship . . . which is different from the true religion, is superstition;" not surprisingly, we are instructed to avoid superstition and cleave to true religion. At the same time, superstition "is not all and wholly rejected," because it has "a certain resemblance to religion," because the various pagan authorities were inevitably not believers in the true religion, and because there are certain superstitious practices which the church tolerates, such as "when worms and locusts are excommunicated . . . [and] when bells and images are baptized, and such like."

DOP goes quite a bit further, however, in arguing that superstition has its place:

> Whosoever . . . in his religion, though false, yet believeth most strongly that it is true, and elevates his spirit by reason of this his credulity, until it be assimilated to those spirits who are the chief leaders of that religion, may work those things which nature and reason discern not; but incredulity and diffidence doth weaken every work not only in superstition, but also in true religion, and enervates the desired effect even of the most strong experiments.[65]

The extension of this argument fits neatly into Faivre's category of "the praxis of concordance," i.e. the theory that there is a truth behind all religions, such that the practice of establishing common denominators among several systems is understood to produce illumination. Chapter 8

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[63] *DOP* III:2, 406/444; does not appear in W.
[64] *DOP* III:4, 409-12/450-51.
[65] *DOP* III:4, 411/451, passage not in W.

discusses "What the ancient philosophers have thought concerning the divine Trinity,"[66] and argues that such thinkers as Plotinus, Philo, Hermes Trismegistus (who "seemeth to prophesy of the covenant of grace to come, and of the mystery of regeneration"[67]), and "the Indian philosophers" understood the triune nature of God to some extent, although chapter 9 affirms that the Catholic doctrine "is the true faith, concerning which if any man doubt, and not firmly believe, he is far from the hope of eternal life and salvation."[68] In essence the "praxis of concordance" here is simply a trope of early modern humanist philosophy and theology, the existence of a *prisca theologia* or *philosophia perennis*.[69] For Agrippa, as for Pico, Ficino, and the vast majority of magical thinkers of this period, the religion and philosophy of the ancients contain nuggets of gold which the "wise seeker" can draw forth.

As indicated by Faivre's sixth component (transmission) the focus on *prisca theologia* and its hidden nature often shades into claims about the manner by which seemingly lost truths have come down to a given writer. On the one hand, transmission is part of the initiation problem we have discussed previously, but the validity of particular modes of occult thought was also often established by historical claims, as with the antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus.

Kabbalah too had an ancient and secret history of transmission. In addition to the standard story of Moses's secret teachings to the seventy or seventy-two wise men, Reuchlin in *De arte cabalistica* had traced a Kabbalistic lineage from Adam through Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and down to modern times, in which each important Kabbalistic patriarch was instructed by a specific angel:

> "Our fathers' teachers were famous angels. Raziel was Adam's." By the will of God this angel showed him the path to atonement. He gave Adam divine words, to be interpreted allegorically, in the way of Kabbalah. No

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[66] *DOP* III:8, 418-22/460-61.
[67] *DOP* III:8, 419/460.
[68] *DOP* III:9, 423/465.
[69] The notions of *prisca theologia*, *prisca magia*, *philosophia perennis*, etc. have received extended treatment in nearly all the works of Frances Yates. Of particular importance also is D. P. Walker, "The *Prisca Theologia* in France," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17 (1954), 204-59.

> word, no letter, however trifling, not even the punctuation, was without significance.[70]

For *DOP*, the value of ancient occult philosophies is not wholly bound up in either "concordance" or "transmission." That is, while the antiquity of Kabbalah and its supposed partial agreement with Christian revelation are evidence of *legitimacy*, the magical *efficacy* of Kabbalistic practices is also dependent on the fact that the Jewish Kabbalists *believe* in it. In addition, the secret character of that lore furthers the strength of its practitioners' belief, because it is not "poured into prating and incredulous minds."

Thus in *DOP* the force of any occult practice depends on four factors, two analytical and two practical. On the analytical side, the accuracy and validity of a practice is established by (1) comparison and (2) chronology—comparison to other forms of *prisca magia*, chronology of transmission. On the practical side, the crucial elements are (1) belief and (2) secrecy. In sum, no practice is inherently powerful, but requires activation by a practitioner's faith and will.

Religion and the Divine

The true Christian magus, because of his correct faith, is subject to a threat not relevant to those whose faith is mere superstition, i.e. who believe in a false religion:

> [W]hosoever, without the mixture of other powers, worketh by religion alone, if he shall persevere long in the work, is swallowed up by the divine power and cannot live long: but whosoever shall attempt this and not be purified, doth bring upon himself judgement, and is delivered to the Evil Spirit, to be devoured.[71]

It is no surprise that a magician who puts his faith in false gods is condemned to perdition; what is striking here is that a Christian magus may be destroyed by the very purity and truth of his praxis.[72]

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[70] Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, 8[r], Q2 (69), qq. "the commentary on the *Book of the Creation* [Sefer Yeẓirah]."

[71] *DOP* III:6, 415/455; passage not in W.

[72] Presumably a reference to the Kabbalistic "death of the kiss," and probably to Pico's Thesis 11>13 (*900 Theses*, 525): "Whoever operates in the Cabala without the mixture of anything extraneous, if he is long in the work, will die from *binsica*, and if he errs in the work or comes to it unpurified, he will be devoured by Azazel through the property of Judgement."

> Therefore we must know, that as by the influx of the first agent, is produced oftentimes something without the cooperation of the middle causes, so also by the work of religion alone, may something be done without the application of natural and celestial virtues; but no man can work by pure religion alone. . . .[73]

The argument here is subtle and dangerous; or rather, it is subtle *because* it is dangerous. Hidden within this apparently orthodox formulation—the idea that one can be swallowed up by ecstatic communion with the divine—is the far more radical notion that demonic magic is necessary for the safety of the Christian magician: magic performed in light of true faith requires the use of mediating forces, "the mixture of other powers," if the magus is not to be destroyed by the purity of his own practice.

> Seeing that the being and operation of all things, depend on the most high God, Creator of all things, from thence also on the other divine powers, to whom also is granted a power of fashioning and creating, not principally indeed, but instrumentally by virtue of the First Creator . . . it is necessary therefore that every magician know that very God . . . and also the other gods, or divine powers (which we call the second causes). . . .[74]

The most important such divine powers or second causes are the divine names and emanations, i.e. the *sefirot*, which in *DOP* are equivalent to the pagan gods correctly understood.

> God himself, though he be Trinity in persons, yet is but one only simple essence; notwithstanding we doubt not but that there are in him many divine powers, which as beams flow from him, which the philosophers of the gentiles call gods, the Hebrew masters numerations, we name attributes.[75]

Thus the use of Orphic hymns and other pagan invocations of the gods is not fundamentally dissimilar to the worship of God in some particular aspect—God the Father, God who parted the Red Sea, God who spared Isaac, etc. The orthodoxy of any such invocation depends upon the practitioner's faith and understanding: so long as the magician believes in the true faith, and furthermore knows that in his invocation Mercury is simply the divine aspect of understanding, as is the *sefirah Binah* (בינה), his magical practice avoids idolatry. In addition,

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[73] *DOP* III:6, 414-15/455; passage not in W.
[74] *DOP* III:7, 415/457, passage not in W.
[75] *DOP* III:10, 423/467, passage not in W.

> Sacred words have not their power in magic operations, from themselves, as they are words, but from the occult divine powers working by them in the minds of those who by faith adhere to them; by which words the secret power of God as it were through conduit pipes, is transmitted into them, who have ears purged by faith, and by most pure conversation and invocation of the divine names are made the habitation of God, and capable of these divine influences.[76]

Similarly,

> . . . the garments of God and ornaments, are as it were certain ways and relations, or emanations, or conduit pipes, by the which he diffuseth himself; the hems of which as oft as our mind shall touch, so often the divine power of some member goeth forth, even as Jesus cried out, concerning the woman with the bloody issue, "Somebody hath touched me, for I perceive virtue to go forth from me."[77]

Having established that the invocation of divine names is legitimate, *DOP* moves on to explain that the power of the divine names emanates downward "through all the middle causes into these inferior things," because the execution of the divine will is distributed to various ministering angels, and thence to the stars, "but as it were by instruments, that after this manner all things might work together to serve him. . . ."[78]

> Therefore the heavens receive from the angels, that which they dart down; but the angels from the great name of God and Jesus, the virtue whereof is first in God, afterward diffused into these twelve and seven angels, by whom it is extended into the twelve signs, and into the seven planets, and consequently into all the other ministers and instruments of God, penetrating even to the very depths.[79]

Finally, at the end of chapter 13, *DOP* explains briefly and obliquely the purpose of all this lore for magical effects:

> [I]f a man capable of the divine influence do make any member of his body clean and free from filthiness, then it becometh the *habitale* and proper seat

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[76] *DOP* III:11, 431/476: "Verba itaque sacra non iam ex seipsis, quatenus verba sunt, vim habent in magicis, sed ex occulta vi numinum per illa operante in animis eorum qui illis secundum fidem haerent, in quibus occulta Dei virtus per ea tanquam per vehicula in eos transmittitur, qui habent aures audiendi purgatos per fidem et per purgatissimos mores et per invocationes divinorum facti sunt habitaculum Dei et capaces horum divinorum influxuum;" passage not in W.

[77] *DOP* III:13, 437/487; chapter not in W; the quotation is Mark 5:30.

[78] *DOP* III:12, 435/484; chapter not in W.

[79] *DOP* III:12, 436/484; chapter not in W.

> of the secret limb of God, and of the virtue to the which the same name is ascribed: so that if that member want anything, the name being invocated, whence it dependeth, it is presently heard effectually, according to that, I will hear him, because he hath known my name; and these are the great and hidden mysteries, concerning which it is not lawful to publish more.[80]

The context here is twofold. The majority of chapter 13 discusses the parts and members of God, i.e. Kabbalistic meditations called *Shi'ur Komah*, the measure of the body.[81] In the final portion of the chapter, such speculations are related to the doctrine of man as *imago Dei*:

> These members therefore in God are like to ours, but the Ideas and exemplars of our members, to the which if we rightly conform our members, then being translated into the same image, we are made the true sons of God, and like to God, doing and working the works of God.[82]

The implication is clear: through meditation, contemplation, and ritual invocation of the divine aspects, the magician's soul and body come to conform with increasing exactitude to the nature of the divine, until eventually the magician becomes a "true son of God" and a miracle-worker.

These claims are not unorthodox, and fall easily within a broad spectrum of mystical literature, Christian and Jewish alike. Insofar as *DOP*'s discussion of the need for "other powers" can be understood to refer to this ascent through the divine names, its apparent radicalism is annulled. At the same time, it is important to note that the analysis of the hierarchies of ministering angels and stars occurs in between these other two discussions.

Let us recall Moshe Idel's description of two explanatory models for Kabbalistic magic: on the one hand, the magician may work more or less ecstatically, the practical effect of his techniques being elevation of the soul towards the divine nature; on the other, magical techniques may be employed to draw down power from the *sefirot*. Given our analysis of *DOP* in general, it seems clear that both forms are present here: the use of magical techniques to achieve mystical ends is formulated quite explicitly, but the discussion of angelic hierarchies implies that the same techniques may draw down power.

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[80] *DOP* III:13, 439/488; chapter not in W.

[81] On *Shi'ur Komah*, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 16-18; this extremely complicated lore actually predates Kabbalah per se, but the distinction is of course not made in *DOP*.

[82] *DOP* III:13, 439/488; chapter not in W.

The argument is not unusual in early modern magical literature, and had its most famous formulation in Pico's *Oration*:[83]

> 7. Let us disdain earthly things, despise heavenly things, and, finally, esteeming less whatever is of the world, hasten to that court which is beyond the world and nearest to the Godhead. There, as the sacred mysteries relate, Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones hold the first places; let us, incapable of yielding to them, and intolerant of a lower place, emulate their dignity and their glory. If we have willed it, we shall be second to them in nothing.[84]

In sum, *DOP*'s ceremonial magic has two linked functions. First, the techniques assist the soul's cleaving to God, purifying and elevating the magician toward the divine. Second, through such elevation, the magician gains power over the angels and ministering forces, and can manipulate them to produce worldly effects. The higher the magician rises through the spheres and the divine world, the more powerful the angels which can be thus manipulated; furthermore (as we shall see) such manipulation binds the magician to the superior nature of the angels, aiding further ascent. By linking these two functions, *DOP* consecrates magic: no magician can control spirits whose status is higher than his own, therefore the manipulation of angels is both proof of purity and an instrument for achieving divine union. The radical promise of ceremonial magic is fulfilled: demonic magic leads the soul to God.

Manipulating the Demonic

Demonic magic is the primary form of ceremonial magic in *DOP*, and is discussed more or less explicitly throughout Book III. The techniques are arcane and complex, involving much technical detail of minimal relevance to our present analysis. Rather than summarize *ad nauseam*, I prefer to indicate the range of the text by showing a few examples in detail. The central question here is simple enough: how can one summon and control a demon? I will move through the text more or less in order, taking up three

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[83] Note that the *Oration* itself was not particularly well-known in the sixteenth century: see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 18-19 *et passim*.

[84] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1948; reprint Chicago: Phoenix Press, 1956), 227.

topics: first, demonic names and their manipulation; second, divine frenzy and its use as a ritual technique; and third, purification and its importance to ceremonial magic.

The Names of Demons

Chapter 23 discusses the language of angels. Unlike many contemporary works enamored of Kabbalistic knowledge, *DOP* grants Hebrew only a limited priority. Indeed, the claim here is that the angels speak to us by impressing their meaning upon us:

> [M]any think that if they use any idiom, it is Hebrew, because that was the first of all, and came from heaven, and was before the confusion of languages. . . . But now how angels speak it is hid from us, as they themselves are. . . . But if any speak at a distance from another, he must use a louder voice; but if near, he whispers in his ear: and if he could be coupled to the hearer, a softer breath would suffice; for he would slide into the hearer without any noise, as an image in the eye, or glass. So souls going out of the body, so angels, so demons speak: and what man doth with a sensible voice, they do by impressing the conception of the speech in those to whom they speak, after a better manner than if they should express it by an audible voice.[85]

Although the connection is not made explicit, it would appear that this means of communication parallels the way in which demons are themselves named: Adam imposed names on the angels in the same way as he named the animals. The logical conclusion is striking, and strengthens our earlier reading that a magician's dominance over angels is a normal extension of the dignification produced by true ceremonial magic:

> Hence the Hebrew mecubals[86] think, together with magicians, that it is in the power of man to impose names upon spirits, but of such a man only who is dignified, and elevated to this virtue by some divine gift, or sacred authority.[87]

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[85] *DOP* III:23, 467/530, chapter not in W. Note that this disagrees with Pico: "No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew" (*900 Theses* 9>22, 501).

[86] I.e. Kabbalists (מקובל ים).

[87] *DOP* III:24, 468-69/532: "Hinc putant Hebraeorum mecubales una cum magis esse in potestate hominis et spiritibus nomina imponere, sed illius duntaxat qui iam ad hanc virtutem divino quovis munere aut sacra potestate dignificatus et sublimatus est;" chapter not in W.

For most purposes, however, the names of demons are handed down by tradition, derived in some fashion from Scripture, or simply names of the offices or functions which the demons serve. Chapters 24 through 31 discuss such names, with numerous examples. Unlike the magic squares discussion in II:22, there are few ordered lists of mysterious and arcane-appearing names; on the contrary, these chapters discuss how to derive angelic names from other known facts. There is a good deal of technical material here, deserving comparative analysis with Kabbalistic texts.[88] The complexity and detail of such a study, considering the entire eight chapters with reference to parallels in Book II especially, would require a work of comparable size to the present study. For our purposes, and as an example of the fascinating material found in these chapters, I simply discuss a single chapter and a single set of issues which arise from it.

Chapter 25 is entitled, "How the Hebrew mecubals drew forth the sacred names of angels out of sacred writ, and of the seventy-two angels, which bear the name of God, with the tables of Ziruph, and the commutations of letters and numbers."[89] As indicated in its title, the chapter discusses how to derive angelic and demonic names from the Hebrew texts of scripture, particularly the Shemhamphoras, by which seventy-two names emerge from Exodus 14:19-21.[90] As an example, verses 5 and 6 of "the 35 psalm with the Hebrews, but with us the 34," read:[91]

Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the Lord driving them on!	לפני־רוח ומלאך יהוה דוחה׃ יהיו כמץ
Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord pursuing them!	יהי־דרכם חשך וחלקלקות ומלאך יהוה רדפם׃

[88] Such comparisons, which would require linguistic expertise beyond my own, might go some way toward solving a rather vexed problem with regard to Agrippa's Kabbalah—that is, how much Hebrew he knew, and from what sources (textual and personal) he learned Hebrew and Kabbalah. Some of the groundwork for such analysis has been laid by Chaim Wirszubski in *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism.*

[89] *DOP* III:25, 472-81/538-46: "Quomodo Hebraeorum mecubales sacra angelorum nomina e Sacris Scripturis eliciant atque de septuaginta duobus angelis qui ferunt nomen Dei cum tabulis Ziruph et commutationum literarum et numerorum."

[90] There are 72 letters in each of the three verses. To extract the 72 names, write the first verse on a line forwards, then the second on the next line backwards, and the third verse on the next line forwards again, so that you have 72 columns of three letters each. To each three-letter root, add an angelic suffix (e.g. יה, אל), producing 72 names.

[91] Psalm 35:5-6, Revised Standard Version and Stuttgart Hebrew Bible.

Each verse contains a specific reference to an angel, a *mal'ak* (מל אך), and by taking the first letters of the words describing each angel we get three letters, to which we then add the angelic-name suffix *el* (אל) to produce the angel's name. Thus from *və-**m**al'ak **y**hwh **d**oṭeh* (ומל אך יהוה דוחה) in verse 5 we get the letters *mem-yod-daleṭ*, to which we add *el* and produce the name Midael (מידאל), and similarly Mirael (מיראל) from *və-**m**al'ak **y**hwh **r**odəfam*.

A more complex and sophisticated method is described in the last paragraph, which I shall analyze in some detail:

> . . . [Apart from the previous methods there are] those which are extracted by the tables of Ziruph, and the tables of commutations, of which we made mention above. And because these tables serve for all names, as well divine, as angelical, we shall therefore subjoin them to this chapter.

First, note that *ẓiruf* (צרף) is a Hebrew word meaning "to refine," and in Agrippa's usage it refers to a type of *gematria*. Before going on, a few words of explanation of *gematria* are necessary. We have seen that *gematria* often means simply the Hebrew numerical system in which *alef* א = 1, *beṭ* ב = 2, and so forth. More broadly, however, *gematria* "consists of explaining a word or group of words [of Scripture] according to the numerical value of the letters, or of substituting other letters of the alphabet for them in accordance with a set system."[92] The latter sort, based on substitution, is called *temurah*, and an example occurs in Jeremiah (25:26 and 51:41), where the prophet speaks of the city of Sheshak (ששב). Each letter is transformed by counting how far into the alphabet it occurs, such that *alef* is one, *bet* two, and so forth, and then replaced by the letter an equivalent distance from the end of the alphabet, so that *alef* becomes *tov*, *bet* becomes *shin*, and so forth. When applied to the name Sheshak, this is revealed to be *bavel* (בבל), or Babylon.

Agrippa's *ẓiruf* table (figure 10) can be read cryptographically in the following manner. The top line gives the Hebrew alphabet, from right to left, in order. Each line below shifts one place to the left, wrapping the extra letters over to the right side.

The usual name for this cipher is the Vigenère cipher, named for Blaise de Vigenère, who is often thought of as having invented it in 1586 in his *Traicté des chiffres*.[93] I have never seen Agrippa mentioned in the context of

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[92] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 337.

[93] Blaise de Vigenère, *Traicté des chiffres* (Paris, 1586), 46^{r}-49^{v}.

Th	Sh	R	Q	Ẓ	P	Aa	S	N	M	L	K	Y	T	Ḥ	Z	V	H	D	G	B	A
ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א
ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת
ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש
ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר
צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק
פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ
ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ
ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע
נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס
מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ
ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ
כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל
י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ
ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י
ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט
ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח
ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז
ה	ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו
ד	ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה
ג	ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד
ב	א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג
א	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב
A	Ṭ	Sh	R	Q	Ẓ	P	Aa	S	N	M	L	K	Y	T	Ḥ	Z	W	H	D	G	B

Figure 10. Right Table of Commutations, *DOP* III:25, 475/541.

this cipher, but knowledgeable historians of cryptography generally recognize that the system was invented by Johannes Trithemius, Agrippa's one-time mentor whom we discussed in a different context in chapter two (see page 53).

According to Trithemius's explanation of this cipher (as a cipher) in book V of *Polygraphia*, the encryption of a message proceeds as follows: find each letter of the plaintext, or message to be enciphered, in the top line, i.e. the alphabet in regular order—thus the first letter of the message is not enciphered. The second letter of the message is enciphered by moving down to the second line, i.e. the alphabet shifted one place. The third letter is enciphered with the third line, and so forth. Trithemius gives an example

message beginning, "Hunc caveto virum. . . ." Using the *tabula recta* which appears in *Polygraphia*, this is enciphered HXPF GFBMCZ FUEIB.[94]

The problem of cryptography in magic is not a simple one. It is fairly clear that encryption can be closely tied to the issue of secrecy discussed above; encipherment provides a simple and direct means by which to restrict a text's readership to the initiates (those who already know the cipher) and the wise (those who can figure it out). As such, cryptography and esotericism in the broad sense are allied fields.

But scholarly analysis of Trithemius's books on cryptography remains mainly divided into two radically opposed camps, one claiming that Trithemius's cryptography is "really" magic, and the other that Trithemius's magic is "really" cryptography.

The debate centers on *Steganographia: Hoc est, ars per occultam scripturam animi sui voluntatem absentibus aperienda certa* [Secret Writing: that is, a Reliable Art of Opening Your Mind's Purpose to Absent People Through a Disguised Message], written circa 1500, which circulated in manuscript throughout the sixteenth century but was first published in 1606.

As an example of the contents of *Steganographia*, the work opens with a mode of sending messages by compelling the "malicious and untrustworthy" spirit Pamersiel. To do this, first invoke the Trinity, then transcribe the message, being sure to face East; the spirit is compelled by means of a formula beginning, "Pamersiel oshurmy delmuson Thafloin peano charustea melany. . . ." The recipient, who must also be adept in this art, faces East and recites a formula beginning "Lamarton anoyr bulon madrisel traschon. . . ." This will make the sender's message crystal-clear to the recipient's mind. It is important that one include the name or sign of the communicating spirit (here Pamersiel), and not send plaintext (an undisguised message).

The strange formulae, demonic names, and the various other fascinating magical systems in *Steganographia* can be understood cryptographically. Apparently the first printed decryptions which refer explicitly to

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[94] Johannes Trithemius, *Polygraphia libri sex* (Oppenheim, 1518). Incidentally, this cryptographic technique is not as simpleminded as it might at first appear. David Kahn, the most important historian of cryptography today, remarks that "The great advantage of this procedure . . . is that a new alphabet is brought into play with each letter. . . . Trithemius' system is . . . the first instance of a progressive key, in which all the available cipher alphabets are exhausted before any are repeated. Modern cipher machines very often embody such key progressions," David Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).

Trithemius's book occur in Gaspar Schott's *Schola steganographica*,[95] but already in Giambattista della Porta's *De furtivis literarum notis*[96] systems equivalent to some of Trithemius's had appeared; in addition, some of the *Steganographia* manuscript copies had been accompanied by a *Clavis*, likely composed by Trithemius himself.

The "Pamersiel" message is one of the simplest to decipher. The first word is simply the name of the demon, also in a sense the name of the deciphering system, so that the recipient knows how to go about decryption. The rule of "Pamersiel" is to eliminate every other, starting with words and then moving to letters. That is, delete every other word, beginning with the first, then from the remaining words delete every other letter, again beginning with the first:

> Lamarton anoyr bulon madrisel traschon ebrasothea panthenon nabrulges Camery itrasbier rubanthy nadres Calmosy ormenu lan ytules demy rabion hamorphyn.
>
> anoyr madrisel ebrasothea nabrulges itrasbier nadres ormenu ytules rabion
>
> nym die ersten bugstaben de omny uerbo

In other words, "Take the first letters of every word." The actual message which accompanies the formula will therefore be encrypted by the system described in the formula.[97]

A great number of such systems appear in *Steganographia* and the later *Polygraphia*, some of them extremely sophisticated, some (like the Pamersiel system) very simple. Some will produce a message which, like the formula above, appears to be gibberish; others produce a perfectly comprehensible but irrelevant message. For example, the message which accompanies the Pamersiel formula reads as a rather trite credal confession and plea for divine forgiveness; if one simply reads off the first letters as instructed, however, the plaintext appears.

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[95] Würzburg, 1665.

[96] Naples, 1563 and 1602.

[97] Wayne Shumaker deciphers the message, beginning "Lucidum jubar aeternae Beatitudinis," as meaning "Dear Faithful One: You will be armed as best you can next Monday and about five will wait for us at the gate; we will appear there with our followers." The apparent content of the message, i.e. the ciphertext, begins "Bright radiance of the eternal Blessedness, most excellent King, most strong governor and defender of all who live virtuously, refuge of exiles. . . ;" *Renaissance Curiosa* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1982), 101-02.

In his work *Renaissance Curiosa* Wayne Shumaker gives a detailed account of *Steganographia* on which I have relied considerably; his overall assessment of the work is that it is "purely" cryptographic: "In view of all this [demonic names and such] the *misreading* of the text as magical evokes no surprise."[98] To be fair, Shumaker thinks that "the label 'magical' would be accurate, but the magic is natural, not demonic."[99] ". . . [T]he conjuration and use of angels—or devils—in Books I and II was long ago recognized as a fraud and does not deserve to be taken seriously,"[100] and as Trithemius in *Polygraphia* (1518) says that he has "no commerce with demons, never had any, and with God's protection will never have any: no studies in magic, necromancy, or the profane arts," Shumaker feels that "it is indiscreet as well as ungenerous to assume that he lied in his teeth."[101]

Frances Yates, not surprisingly, can be placed at the other end of the scale from Shumaker. In *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* she states:

> An interesting example of applied magic, or power magic, is the *Steganographia* of Johannes Trithemius. . . . [which] purports to be, and perhaps really is to some extent, about cryptography or ways of writing in cipher. It is also, however, Cabalist angel magic. . . . Trithemius aims at using [an] angelic network for the very practical purpose of transmitting messages to people at a distance by telepathy; he also seems to hope to gain from it knowledge 'of everything that is happening in the world.'[102]

Twenty years later, she remarks that, "Trithemius developed Pico's Cabalism in an extremely magical direction; the fifth [sic] book of his *Steganographia* teaches the techniques of angel-conjuring."[103]

Yates developed her opinion from the more cautious statements of D. P. Walker, who suggested that while "it cannot be proved with absolute certainty that Trithemius was in the habit of performing magical operations with the help of planetary angels, . . . it is highly probable." His main evidence is that book III of *Steganographia* "does not . . . contain any examples of enciphered messages. . . . It seems most unlikely that these [pictures of angels with astrological calculations] could be disguised

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[98] Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, 97, emphasis mine.
[99] Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, 91.
[100] Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, 99.
[101] Shumaker, *Renaissance Curiosa*, 109, quoting Trithemius, *Polygraphia libri sex* (Oppenheim, 1518), 6: "Nulla mihi sunt, nulla fuerunt, & protectore deo nulla erunt cum daemonibus commertia: nulla in magicis, necromanticis, seu profanis artibus studia."
[102] Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 145, quoting *Steganographia* (Frankfurt, 1606), 179.
[103] Yates, "Renaissance Philosophers in Elizabethan England," 213.

directions for encipherment of any kind," although books I and II are clearly cryptographic in nature, such that "the angels and spirits in them can be satisfactorily explained as descriptions of the methods of encipherment."[104]

In 1999, however, the *New York Times* reported that Thomas Ernst and Jim Reeds, working independently, had proved that "the demonology [of the third book] was simply a disguise for a code."[105] In other words, both Ernst and Reeds demonstrated that book III can be understood as entirely cryptographic, in the sense that the messages can indeed be deciphered, albeit by rather more complex methods than those we have seen in the Pamersiel example—in fact, they are encrypted using sophisticated techniques similar to the progressive keys which we saw in *DOP* III:25.

The problem with this debate is that the question has been whether *Steganographia* is cryptography or magic. But if we turn back to *DOP* III:25, where Agrippa gives cryptographic tables in his discussion of angelic names, we are led to a conclusion which annuls the whole basis of the argument. If we choose not to be "ungenerous and indiscreet," there is no reason to think that Agrippa did not know what he was talking about, nor that he skewed his old master's teachings in a way which would be entirely unacceptable to the latter. Agrippa's interpretation, then, is that cryptographic systems are themselves magical ones, in the same way that mathematics, astronomy, and natural philosophy are fundamental building blocks of occult philosophy. In other words, one cannot distinguish absolutely between cryptography and magic, and tacking on the apotropaic "natural" does not change matters—indeed, the placement of *ẓiruf* in Book III indicates that in *DOP*, such cryptography is not natural but rather *religious* or ceremonial magic.

Prophecy, Frenzy, and Ecstasy

Chapters 45 through 52 discuss "soothsaying and frenzy" (*vaticinium et furor*), by which "oracles and spirits descend from the gods or from the demons upon the magician.[106] This is one of the highest forms of ceremonial magic, because the soul becomes aligned to and strengthened by the demon which enters it. Thus through frenzy and ecstasy the magician's soul

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[104] Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 86-7.

[105] Gina Kolata, "A Mystery Unraveled, Twice," *New York Times*, Tuesday, 14 April 1998, sec. B, pp.11 & 14.

[106] *DOP* III:45, 545/616.

rises to the divine and is perfected. There are three major forms: frenzy (of which there are four kinds), ecstasy, and oracle. The majority of *DOP*'s discussion focuses on the types of frenzy, and I follow that emphasis here.

In frenzy, the higher aspects of the soul (mind and intellect especially) are abstracted from the senses, and rise into the heavens to the divine. Each kind of frenzy has a particular effect on the soul, making it more like the divine in some specific manner. Thus the several frenzies constitute a rising series, or rather, a set of rungs on the ladder up to God.

The first kind of frenzy proceeds from the Muses, "the souls of the celestial spheres," and thus there are nine degrees parallel to the nine spheres (seven heavenly bodies, fixed stars, and *primum mobile*).[107] The brief descriptions of each degree generally refer back to Books I and II, where the natural and celestial objects and structures favorable to each sphere were detailed. There is very little detail here. It appears that each form of frenzy induces the soul to rise to the appropriate sphere, which suggests a kind of course of nine degrees, at the end of which the magician's soul would be attuned to the *primum mobile*.

Dionysian frenzy, the second kind, "doth . . . divert the soul into the mind, the supreme part of itself, and makes it a fit and pure temple of the gods, in which the divine spirits may dwell."[108] The divine spirits here are angels in the narrow and superior sense, such as Michael, Uriel, Raziel, and so forth; such angels sometimes speak prophecy through human mouths. Dionysian frenzy is produced "by expiations exterior, and interior, by solemnities, rites, temples, and observations . . ." (although few details are given), and by it "the soul . . . is filled . . . with felicity, wisdom, and oracles. . . ."[109]

The third kind of frenzy "proceeds from Apollo, viz. from the mind of the world. This doth . . . make the soul rise above the mind, by joining it with deities, and demons."[110] The primary purposes of this art are to produce prophecy and intellectual wisdom, here seemingly equated:

> We read . . . that Rabbi Johena, the son of Jochahad, did after that manner [by ritual techniques to bring on Apollonian frenzy] enlighten a certain rude countryman, called Eleazar, being altogether illiterate, that being compassed about with a sudden brightness, did unexpectedly preach such high mysteries

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[107] *DOP* III:46, 545-48/618-19.
[108] *DOP* III:47, 549/621.
[109] *DOP* III:47, 549-50/621.
[110] *DOP* III:48, 550/623.

> of the Law to an assembly of wise men, that he did even astonish all that were near him.[111]

The final kind of frenzy is that of Venus, "and it doth by a fervent love convert, and transmute the mind to God, and makes it altogether like to God, as it were the proper image of God."[112] The knowledge communicated to the soul by this frenzy transcends prophecy and moves towards divine knowledge: "the soul being so converted into God . . . doth beside that it hath . . . obtained the spirit of prophecy, sometimes work wonderful things, and greater than the nature of the world can do, which works are called miracles." It is essential that *DOP* is specific about the miraculous nature of the powers of the Venus-frenzied soul: "such a man is more excellent than they that are in heaven, or at least equal to them." By this highest form of frenzy, the soul rises to the pinnacle of heaven.

It is not explicit that the lower degrees and kinds of frenzy are prerequisites for the higher, but the structure of the discussion supports such a reading. The cycle of nine Muses rises through the nine celestial spheres, which are rational/intellectual, while Dionysian frenzy "divert[s] the soul into the mind." There is thus excellent reason to think that the frenzies are a graded sequence, raising the soul through the spheres, into the layers of the divine, and finally to God himself.

None of this discussion is apparently unorthodox; prophecy and divine frenzy are well-attested in Christian literature from the Bible onwards, and *DOP* carefully cites the apostle Peter.[113] At the same time, we must bear in mind that *DOP* discusses such frenzy as part of ceremonial magic. In essence, the claim is that divine frenzy and ecstasy are produced by the very techniques—elevated to their highest forms, to be sure—of demonic magic!

The logical and structural continuity of the chapters on angelic names with those on frenzy thus constructs a radical thesis in an apparently orthodox manner. If it is granted that the highest form of prophecy (not to mention the working of miracles) is caused by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a human soul, and that lesser forms of prophecy are caused by a similar indwelling of angels, then we can logically extend this progression downwards to ordinary demonic powers. Therefore ceremonial magic, which aims primarily to contact and manipulate demonic beings, is simply a general category at the apex of which is a kind of sainthood. Furthermore

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[111] *DOP* III:48, 550/623.
[112] *DOP* III:49, 553/627.
[113] *DOP* III:45, 545/616, citing II Peter 1:21.

the most straightforward means to achieve this highest of ends is to work one's way up the chain, i.e. to begin by contacting the lower orders of demons (not infernal ones, naturally), then work up to the Lunar Muse, and so on up to God.

Purification

The great danger of demonic magic, of course, is that it is not always clear which sort of demons one is contacting—angelic or diabolic.

> [T]hose that neglect [contemplation of the divine], trusting only to natural and worldly things, are wont often to be confounded by divers errors and fallacies, and very oft to be deceived by evil spirits; but the understanding of divine things purgeth the mind from errors, and rendereth it divine, giveth infallible power to our works, and driveth far the deceits and obstacles of all evil spirits, and together subjects them to our commands.[114]

Thus the principal means by which to avoid the deceptions of evil demons is divine contemplation. To this are added various means of ritual purification, whose analysis takes up the final chapters of *DOP*.

> But the greatest part of all ceremonies consists in observing cleanliness, and purity, first of the mind, then of the body, and of those things which are about the body. . . . Now impurity, because it oftentimes infects the air, and man, disturbs that most pure influence of celestial and divine things, and chaseth away the pure spirits of God. But sometimes impure spirits, and deceiving powers, that they be worshipped, and adored for gods, require also this purity. Therefore here is great need of caution. . . .[115]

One crucial purpose of purification, then, is to ensure the goodness and purity of any demons summoned. At the same time, chapters 53 through 64 harp on purification for another reason, more in keeping with the discussion of frenzy and ecstasy: purity of body and especially of mind not only *enables* divine instruction but *causes* it. "A human soul therefore when it be rightly purged, and expiated, doth then, being loosed from all impurity . . . instruct itself. . . ."[116]

The theory behind this is similar to that which we saw in frenzy:

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[114] *DOP* III:e.d., 399/435.
[115] *De vanitate* 46, 97-98/134.
[116] *DOP* III:53, 563-64/639.

> For by how much the more we have relinquished the animal and the human life, by so much the more we live like angels, and God, to which being conjoined, and brought into a better condition, we have power over all things, ruling over all.[117]

It is in this lengthy survey of purity and purification that, at last, we see some aspects of ritual technique and theory spelled out clearly. Since purity induces divinity, as it were, it follows that "the greatest part of all ceremonies consists in observing cleanliness, and purity. . . ." The majority of the discussion of purifications is essentially a list: cleanliness, abstinence, penitence, adorations, sacrifices, prayers, consecrations. Buried within the exhaustive citations, however, are several important distinctions which clarify the nature of ritual magic in *DOP*.

A critical distinction is drawn between "sacred" and "consecrated": *sacred* means "made holy by the gods themselves, or their demons, being . . . dedicated to us by the gods themselves,"[118] while *consecrated* means "dedicated and consecrated by man to God"[119] This is not itself an unusual or problematic split, but what falls into the two is worth examining closely.

The list of sacred things has three elements. First, demons are sacred, "because in them God dwells. . . . Whence it is read in Exodus: I will send my angel who shall go before thee; observe him, neither think that he is to be despised, because my name is in him."[120] Second, "mysteries" are sacred, in which category are "sacred names and characters," the cross, and certain prayers such as the Lord's Prayer. Third, certain materials are sacred, as chrism, catechumen oil, and holy water. The oddity of this list is that it equates demons with such things as the Lord's Prayer and holy water. In the context of ritual magic, the implication is that all sacred things are *to be used*; that is, a magical ritual may employ a demon in the same way and for the same reasons as it employs holy water.

The list of consecrated things is a good deal longer. First, vows and sacrifices; second, images, idols, icons, pictures, etc.; third, ritual actions, such as genuflexion, sprinkling holy water, burning candles, and so forth, collectively referred to as "exterior rites;"[121] fourth, priests, who also have the power to consecrate additional objects; fifth, consecrated names, seals, and

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[117] *DOP* III:55, 570/644, passage not in W.
[118] *DOP* III:63, 587/668.
[119] *DOP* III:63, 588/668.
[120] *DOP* III:63, 587-88/668, quoting Exodus 23:20-21.
[121] *DOP* III:63, 589-90/669.

characters; and sixth, consecrated objects, which seems to be a catch-all. To these lists are added times, which may also be either sacred or consecrated, as the Sabbath on the one hand or a feast day on the other.

There are two points which should be made with regard to the lists of consecrated and opposed to sacred things. First, we saw above that holy water and oil are sacred, because divinely instituted; at the same time, the acts of sprinkling holy water, or anointing with oil, are consecrated. Given that sacred things may be *used*, the suggestion here is that the act of using a *sacred* thing is a *consecrated* act, which is to say "dedicated . . . by man to God." In the context of ritual magic, this confirms our sense that manipulation of any divine thing is licit, even required, so long as the manipulating magus consecrates the action by his will toward divinity.

Second, "names, seals, and characters" appear in both lists. The distinction here is certainly that between divinely instituted names and those derived from Scripture or from offices. In the midst of the discussion of *consecrated* names, however, appears a striking passage which sheds considerable light on *DOP*'s relationship with Kabbalah:

> [There are also] names, figures, characters, and seals, which contemplative men, in purity of mind, for their secret vows, have devoted, dedicated and consecrated to the worship of God. . . . Thus not only by barbarous words, but also by <Hebrew,> Egyptian, Greek, Latin, and the names of other languages, being devoted to God, and attributed and dedicated to his essence, power or operation, we sometimes do wonders. . . .[122]

It is clear from the context that this passage refers to names like "God the Father," "God the Creator," or other names which have to do with offices, natures, and aspects: "so the Greeks call Jupiter, Ζῆνα ἀπὸ τὸ ζῆν which signifieth to live, because he giveth life to all things. . . ."[123] If we recall that the Greek gods and their offices were paralleled to the *sefirot*, it is fairly certain that the names of the emanations too would be *consecrated* rather than *sacred* names. *Sacred* names, then, are limited to a small number of *personal* names, i.e. the Tetragrammaton, or Christ, which are *mysteries*.

And yet, I emphasize that the word "Hebrew" does not appear in the Juvenile Draft, but was inserted only in the final edition of *DOP*. Where Pico had argued, as noted earlier, that "No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a

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[122] *DOP* III:63, 591/669-70.
[123] *DOP* III:63, 591/670.

magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew,"[124] the final draft of *DOP* suggests that the *language* of the name has little to do with its power. This reading is corroborated by already quoted remark in chapter 24, on demonic names:

> Many and divers are the names of good spirits, and bad: but their proper, and true names, as those of the stars, are known to God alone, who only numbers the multitude of stars, and calls them all by their names, whereof none can be known by us but by divine revelation. . . . But the masters of the Hebrew think that the names of the angels were imposed upon them by Adam. . . .[125]

The implication of the insertion of "Hebrew" is, I think, that when writing the Juvenile Draft Agrippa followed Reuchlin's and Pico's Kabbalistic understanding of Hebrew's inherent superiority over all other languages—hardly surprising, given that only a year before he had been lecturing on *De verbo mirifico* in Dôle. Over the next twenty-odd years, however, the status of Hebrew—and of language itself—shifts in Agrippa's philosophy: no human language can contain the ultimate truths, because no human language can be truly transparent.

This brings us to some final points about purification and ritual method. In chapter 58, on adorations and vows, we learn that the purpose of such prayers is that "by the application of them to any deity we do so far move it, that he may direct his speech and answer by a divine way, by which . . . God speaks with men, but so occultly that very few perceive it."[126] Later in the same chapter, we read:

> Now that is the best prayer, which is not uttered in words, but that which with a religious silence and sincere cogitation is offered up to God, and that which with the voice of the mind and words of the intellectual world, is offered to him.[127]

If we situate this discussion of silent prayer within the broader examination of ritual techniques, and recall that ritual techniques follow a lengthy consideration of oracles and prophecy, it is clear that *DOP* has added a third

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[124] Pico, *900 Theses* 9>22, 501.
[125] *DOP* III:24, 468/532; chapter not in W.
[126] *DOP* III:58, 574/652, passage not in W.
[127] *DOP* III:58, 575/652: "Melior autem et optima oratio, quae non ore profertur, sed quae silentio sancto et cogitatione integra Deo offertur quaeque voce mentis inclamans verbis intellectualis mundi veneratur praesules deos;" passage not in W. See also the passage from I:69 quoted on page 61 above.

kind of language—the "occult" voice and words of the intellectual and divine world. This language transcends speech and writing, and the fallen nature of language in general, and simply communicates transparently.

Again, the notion of a divine language is hardly radical or problematic. At the same time, *DOP* claims that while the true magus can employ this "language," *the angels cannot.* When dealing with inferior deities and spirits, the "various cooperators and instruments of God, viz.: the heavens, stars, administrating spirits, the celestial souls, and heros, which we must implore as porters, intepreters, administrators, mediators," the magician must use other forms of communication, while the "voice of the mind" is directed to God alone.

This divine super-language requires purity and perfection in the mind; in fact it is the ability to use this language which constitutes the proper object of ritual purification. In this language, the magician simply expresses his will, and God expresses His: once the magus has reached this highest plane, he communicates directly with God. He speaks prophecy by participating in divine omniscience. Similarly, he performs miracles by participating in divine omnipotence. Indeed, prophecy and miracle are not sharply distinguished in Book III, suggesting that the magus, by acting as a perfect translator of the divine will—which is equivalent to the divine language—is transformed into a perfect instrument of that will.

In sum, the highest ritual magic is that by which the magician directly enacts the divine will in the natural and celestial worlds.

How to Summon a Demon

The reader may now expect (or hope for) a reconstruction of a demonic summoning ritual, incorporating all these elements in some fashion, perhaps with commentary. Unfortunately, I cannot fulfil that hope without wild speculations extending the present analysis far beyond *DOP* and into the literature of ritual magic more generally; in short, Agrippa simply does not provide sufficient information to perform the reconstruction.

The descriptions of rituals which do appear in *DOP* are essentially parenthetical remarks, often amusing but not terribly helpful. The following two examples are fairly typical:

> I have seen and known some, writing on virgin parchment the name and seal of some spirit in the hour of the Moon: which when afterward he gave to be devoured by a water frog, and had muttered over some verse, the frog being

> let go into the water, rains and showers presently followed. I also saw the same man inscribing the name of another spirit with the seal thereof in the hour of Mars, which was given to a crow, who being let go, after a verse muttered over, presently there followed from that corner of the heaven, whither he flew, lightnings, shakings, and horrible thunders, with thick clouds.[128]

This appears in the first of the eight chapters detailing demonic names and how to derive them. In the context of the power of divine names, chapter 11 mentions

> . . . a sacred sigil [*signaculum*] . . . against any diseases of man, or any griefs whatsoever, in whose foreside are the four squared names of God. . . . But all must be done in most pure gold, or virgin parchment, pure, clean and unspotted, also with ink made for this purpose, of the smoke of consecrated wax lights, or incense, and holy water; the actor must be purified and cleansed by sacrifice, and have an infallible hope, a constant faith, and his mind lifted up to the most high God, if he would surely obtain this divine power.[129]

Insofar as one can adduce a set of instructions from such descriptions, a demonic summoning would seem to contain the following components, divided chronologically:

Prior to the Ritual

(1) Selection of an appropriate type of demon. This depends on the purpose for which the summoning is to be performed. If we wish to produce the Apollonian frenzy, for instance, we might choose to summon a Solar demon.

(2) Selection of an appropriate time. For a Solar demon, we might choose a time when the Sun is ascendant, perhaps with Leo at midheaven.[130]

(3) Derivation of the relevant name. This requires choosing a method by which to derive the name, which method should be appropriate to the office of the demon, and further the technical (often essentially cryptographic) derivation of the name.

(4) Derivation of the proper seal. Again, simply the application of a technical procedure to the derived name. We may note under this heading

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[128] *DOP* III:24, 469/532; passage not in W.

[129] *DOP* III:11, 432-33/476; passage not in W. An image of this sigil appears on 433/477.

[130] See the discussion of astrologically favorable times in chapter 3 (page 113 above).

that, especially when dealing with unpredictable and/or evil demons, it may be necessary to select and derive appropriate circles and texts to trap the demons and to protect the magus.

(5) Purification of the actor(s). Note that the supreme purification, in which the magus communicates directly with the divine, is presumably not necessary, as it is ultimately the *purpose* of the ritual.

At the Time of the Ritual

These steps simply put into practice the steps above. That is, the location should be purified in a manner consistent with (a) the purification of the practitioner(s), and (b) the selected demon. Most information about such techniques is in Books I and II—Book I includes lists of fumigations appropriate to different planets, Book II has information about casting circles and inscribing seals, etc.

(1) Purification of the place.

(2) Construction of the ritual space.

(3) Casting of the circle.

(4) Inscription of the seal.

(5) Recitation of appropriate hymns and/or verses.

(6) Sacrifice of a form appropriate to the demon. Note that "men that are perfect, and truly religious need them not" apart from "the true sacrifice," i.e. the mass.

(7) Consecration of objects.

(8) Words of command. Note that essentially no details are given about what words should be spoken, in what order, etc. No set-speeches appear in *DOP*, unlike most texts on ritual magic (see below).[131]

Beyond this we can go no further. As noted above, Agrippa does not give more explicit instructions, nor does he construct a ritual in recipe format. This is not simply an issue of available genres—the literature of ritual magic in the early modern period includes a great many such recipes, and as such it would not be entirely out of place for a sample ritual to be detailed in *DOP*.[132]

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[131] *DOP* III:60, 582-83/662 includes a few brief imprecations used by the ancients in sacrifices; these take the form "As X is consumed/killed/poured-out, so let X-related-evil be consumed/killed/poured-out." The context suggests that these are not required, but are primarily indicative of the function of the sacrifice.

[132] One might perhaps attempt a total reconstruction on the basis of such ritual magic

There are several reasons why I think a written-out ritual does not in fact appear in the text. First, *DOP* is a theoretical work, not a practical manual, and as such details only the theory of magic. Second, each ritual would need to be significantly different from others, depending on the demon, the purpose, the actors, and the location, to name only a few obvious factors. Third, inclusion of a complete magical ritual would place *DOP* squarely in the proscribed category of ritual magic texts, laying Agrippa open to far more serious and substantial charges than the rather nebulous claims of unorthodoxy actually leveled against him. Fourth, the details of magical practice presumably fall under the heading of "secrets," and as such cannot be revealed openly to all readers. And finally, extending from the previous point, the "wise reader" is supposed to be able to construct his own ritual on the basis of the theoretical details laid down in *DOP*; to give a complete set of ritual instructions voids this function.

Agrippa's Magical Rituals

Despite its skeletal quality, the ritual outline given above affords us considerable material for further analysis. If we recall our earlier discussions of esotericism and modern ritual theory, we may draw several conclusions about the theory of magical ritual in *DOP*.

Let me begin by presuming coherence—that is, I begin with the assumption that *DOP*'s discussions of ritual components, with respect both to content and to relative prioritization, are not accidental or irrelevant. Thus, for example, I assume that the eight chapters devoted to derivation of angelic names implies not only that there are many ways to derive such names but also that these names are important.

With this assumption in mind, one of the most striking aspects of our ritual outline is the apparent unimportance of the final "words of command." Even the briefest glance at early modern ritual magic texts will confirm the strangeness of this lack: most such texts include lengthy (and rather tedious) set-speeches, often in two or more languages and including long lists of arcane-sounding names, which detail the purpose of the ritual,

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texts. To some degree, this is exactly what appears in the *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, and one presumes that the pseudo-Agrippan author of this text intended thereby to fill the apparent gap in Agrippa's Three Books. See *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae liber quartus de occulta philosophia, seu de cerimoniis magicis. Cui accesserunt, Elementa magica Petri de Abano, philosophi*, Marburg, 1559; in *Opera* this is *De Caeremoniis Magicis liber, sed, ut putatur, spurius: qui Quartus Agrippae de Occulta Philosophia habetur*, 1:527-61.

set constraints on the demon's form and manner of appearance, promise rewards for good behavior and threaten dire punishment for disobedience, and instruct the demon in its required tasks.[133] If we assume that this lack of instructions and constraints is not simply a product of the needs of secrecy or the exigencies of potential inquisitorial scrutiny, we may wonder how it is that the demon knows what it is to do. In other words, if the ritual to summon a demon does not seem to include (or at least places no emphasis upon) explicit instructions for what tasks the demon is to perform, how does it find out? If the ritual produces prophetic ecstasy, how does the prophesying power know what is being asked?

The simple, short reading is that, once the demon has appeared, the magus can simply talk to it. After all, most early modern ritual magic texts discuss the forms that the demon may take, the voices it uses, the signs (sounds, smells, visions) which portend its approach, and so forth. Some of these issues are also discussed in *DOP*,[134] but again the descriptions are quite perfunctory; furthermore such a reading emphasizes face-to-face communication in a way quite at odds with the rest of *DOP*'s semiotics.

Instead, I suggest that the relative unimportance of explicit instructions to the demons can be correlated with *DOP*'s failure to provide explicit instructions to the ritualist. I have referred to the latter sort of instructions as recipes; an equally valid metaphor might be musical scores. My point with either metaphor is that the instructions, followed correctly, produce the desired performance—food, music, ritual. But if we return to the idea proposed earlier in this chapter of ritual as *written form*, can it perhaps be said that the ritual is *itself* the recipe or score? In other words, is the *ritual* a text whose correct interpretation or performance produces the desired end?

Let me clarify by continuing the musical metaphor. If a magical ritual, by which I mean not a set of instructions but the *performance* of the ritual,

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[133] Perhaps the easiest way to see this is to examine Arthur Edward Waite's *Book of Black Magic and Pacts* (London: Rider & Sons, 1898; reprinted numerous times in York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, sometimes with slightly varying titles). Waite himself was an important member of the Golden Dawn and Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia (S.R.I.A.) organizations in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and his scholarship is not always reliable. His work on black magic, however, is excellent, as Waite believed that such magic was essentially superstitious nonsense, and thus his book is mainly a series of long excerpts and summaries of major grimoires with periodic scoffing editorial interjections. E.M. Butler's *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949; reprint, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999) is also extremely useful, but has fewer and briefer excerpts.

[134] *DOP* III:19, 457-59/518-19 treats "Of the bodies of the devils."

is like a musical score, then the ritual is presumably then translated into magical or musical language. Here the magician's act does not parallel that of the musician, but rather that of the composer. The magician composes the score (performs the ritual); the demon plays the music (produces the desired magical effect). If the score is sufficiently detailed and clear, the musician plays the music that the composer wants—the ritual itself constrains the demon to perform the effects desired by the magician. Thus explicit *spoken* commands are unnecessary, or at least relatively unimportant, because the *ritual itself* is a set of detailed commands.

Another metaphor, more clearly available within *DOP* and its cultural context, is ritual as hieroglyph. For those who can read the secret, magical language of demonic ritual—magicians and demons—the hieroglyphic ritual has a single, complex meaning. Further, the transparent and motivated nature of the magical hieroglyph is such that the reader is bound by the force of the reference; in other words a demon who reads the ritual cannot help but express its meaning by performing the desired actions.

Several aspects of *DOP*'s discussion of demonic rituals confirm this reading. First, the emphasis placed on demonic names; in the hieroglyphic ritual, the demon is thus written into the text, ensuring that it is bound to the magicians's desired ends. This binding has a double function: the demon is *part of* the text, and as such compelled by its meaning; in addition, the demon is *addressed by* the text, and thus compelled to read it.

Second, the tremendous focus on the magician's ritual purity can also be reread. We may draw a parallel to various literatures on copying sacred texts, in which transcription is understood as a powerful and important ritual act. Further, the magician's participation in the ritual binds him to its meaning in the same way as the demon is bound by its name; sufficient purification ensures that nothing is written into the ritual that should not be, such as base desires or a sinful nature, which could cause a moral shift in the ritual's meaning. Moreover given that (as we saw in Book I) human minds can be bound through their sensual natures, a state of purity helps prevent the magician from being caught in his own magical snare. This point is neatly made in chapter 39:

> Seeing every power and virtue is from above, from God, from the intelligences and stars, who can neither err nor do evil, it is necessary, that all evil, and whatsoever is found disagreeing and dissonant in these inferior things, do proceed, not from the malice of the influence, but from the evil disposition of the receiver. . . . Therefore we being well disposed, the celestial influences cooperate all things for good; but being evil disposed, and having

> for our sins, that divine good, which was in us, departed from us, all things work for evil. . . .[135]

Third, the conception of ritual as hieroglyph clarifies our sense of *DOP*'s ceremonial magic with respect to Faivre's "experience of transmutation." Because the magus is part of the text being read by the demons, the magical effects performed must inevitably affect the magus. There is thus "no separation between knowledge (gnosis) and inner experience, or intellectual activity and active imagination," as Faivre put it. Indeed, if the "intellectual activity" here is the construction of the ritual/text, and the "active imagination" is the enactment of its effects/meaning, then the magician is simultaneously performer and audience, actor and acted-upon, and as such may be said to be utterly transformed by and for gnosis. In addition, Faivre's formulation implies that most ceremonial magic will have a gnostic function, such as to learn or prophesy, which is entirely in accord with the text of Book III.

Finally, we may again note the lack of explicit instructions to the magus, and recognize that in our current reading such written instructions would act as *pharmakoi*. Although instructions remedy the possibility of memory-failure or incorrect ritual construction, they also poison the ritual by displacing the hieroglyph from its proper medium to one ill-suited to the text. At base this is an occult reading of both *Phaedrus* and "Plato's Pharmacy": writing in one medium (ink on paper) is a *pharmakon* for writing in another (ritual, memory, even speech!).[136]

Conclusions

Before turning to general conclusions, there are two issues which should be considered here. First, *DOP* and Christian Kabbalah; and second, writing and ritual magic in *DOP*.

Agrippa's Christian Kabbalah

Our initial discussion of Kabbalah scholarship left us with two primary questions about Kabbalah in *DOP*: First, in what sense if any can Agrippa's

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[135] *DOP* III:39, 517/589; chapter not in W.

[136] In the next chapter I briefly expand upon the implications of such a reading.

Kabbalah be legitimately called Kabbalah? Second, if Agrippa's Kabbalah is Christian Kabbalah, what does that tell us about Christian Kabbalah as a form of thought?

Agrippa's Kabbalah is certainly Kabbalah in any but the most parochial sense, i.e. if it is granted that Kabbalah need not be Jewish. We have seen that Idel's magico-mystical model fits quite well with *DOP*, in which both the rising, ecstatic model of magical ritual and the descending, loosely theosophical model are central. Indeed, the intersection between these two models constitutes a major part of the magician's *itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Further, a number of systems and theories of distinctively Kabbalistic provenance appear clearly in *DOP*, notably the *sefirot*, speculations upon divine and angelic names, and so forth.

It seems certain that Agrippa's sources for these ideas were largely Christian—Pico, Reuchlin, Lazzarelli, Zorzi, Egidius da Viterbo—but he also made use of Jewish sources where they were available to him in Latin—Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orah* in Paulus Riccius's translation *Portae Lucis*, for example. Close examination of Agrippa's sources has been left out of the body of the present analysis, since Vittoria Perrone Compagni's critical edition of *DOP* makes clear which sources were used; it is certainly possible that comparison with the texts available to Pico and Reuchlin would reveal additional sources, but such analysis is outside the scope of the present study. What is relevant here is that Agrippa's Kabbalah derives from reasonably well-informed sources, which made available to him aspects of theosophical, ecstatic, and magical Kabbalah.

The problem with Agrippa as Kabbalist is that he radically reinterprets; the Kabbalah found in *DOP* has strong affinities with aspects of its Jewish sources, but is ultimately quite at odds with Kabbalah at a basic level. The question, then, is whether Agrippa grossly misunderstands Kabbalah, or whether the reinterpretation is in some sense reasonable.

In the present analysis, I have tried to demonstrate the coherence and internal consistency of *DOP*'s Kabbalah. Certain points stand out, particularly the displacement of Hebrew from a supreme linguistic position, which as we have seen appears to be a relatively late development in Agrippa's thought. I suggest, in particular, that the status-shift of Hebrew is emblematic of his skeptical, Christian rethinking of Kabbalistic ideas.

In Agrippa's Kabbalistic sources, and I think Kabbalah generally, the primacy of Hebrew as sacred language is a central article of faith; without this assumption, a good deal of Kabbalistic speculation has no evidentiary foundation. However, Agrippa's deeply Christian skepticism, as well as his

linguistic sophistication, makes highly problematic the proposition that any human language is somehow transparent. Furthermore, Agrippa's skepticism is founded on the notion that one single assumption—the Incarnation of Christ—is required to revitalize and correct all human knowledge; as such, an additional metaphysical absolute such as the perfection of the Hebrew language constitutes a major difficulty.

For the sake of clarity and brevity, I shall summarize Agrippa's skeptical Christian reinterpretation of Kabbalah in a series of steps, as follows:

Christ's Incarnation breaks the dominance of the Hebrew Law, and indeed "the Jews who are most skillful in using the names of God, can operate little or nothing after Christ. . . ."[137]

Now the Incarnation is the appearance in Nature of the spoken Word of God. At this point, the tripartite nature of creation is fully empowered—Christ rules Nature, the world of Speech, as the natural incarnation of Logos; the Holy Spirit rules the Celestial, in the form of the written Word of Scripture; and God the Father rules the divine, the world of transparent and perfect super-language. Therefore the Incarnation completes the formation of the ladder up to God—by following Christ, the magus can rise through the spheres.

Therefore the power and sophistication of Hebrew Kabbalah is not to be despised, but can only take the Christian magus to the peak of those spheres in which the Holy Spirit dominates. Ultimately, the magus must break out of the vicious circle of language, Hebrew and otherwise, and transcend to perfect transparency by supra-linguistic communication with God.

Thus the restoration of all knowledge and truth, which is to say the correlation of all that we think we know against the absolute Truth of God, requires only a single axiomatic assumption—the Incarnation. Furthermore, the ascent to Truth has only one absolute instruction—follow Christ. Along the way, all the *priscae theologiae et magiae* will be helpful, but ultimately the magus must discard them in the same way as the apophatic mystic discards all names as insufficient.

A final corollary of this interpretation is that Jews are excluded from this perfect union with God, because they cannot break out of the sphere of Law without the assistance of Christ.

In sum, Agrippa's Kabbalah is a purely Christian one, treating this sacred Jewish lore as an extremely important and valuable tool, but not granting it

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[137] *De vanitate* 47, 101/137.

fundamental superiority. In a way, we can perhaps say that Agrippa's Christian Kabbalah represents a stage in the maturation of Christian Kabbalah, a step beyond the initial wide-eyed awe of Pico and Reuchlin, and of the young Agrippa himself, for whom the discovery of Kabbalah seemed to offer potential solutions to basic mystical and magical problems.

It remains for future scholarship to ask why Christian Kabbalah died as quickly as it did. After about the mid-seventeenth century, which saw Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's massive *Kabbala denudata* [Kabbalah Unveiled],[138] Christian Kabbalah more or less vanished as a form of occult thought. Jewish Kabbalistic thought, particularly Lurianic Kabbalah, reappears periodically over the next two centuries, in Behmenist thought, in Leibniz's theories of perfect languages,[139] in speculative Freemasonry, even in Schelling's *Die Weltalter*,[140] and comes back to the center of occultism with Eliphas Lévi in the mid-nineteenth century. But Christian Kabbalah, of the sort formulated by Agrippa, Postel, and others in the sixteenth century, has its last gasp with Knorr von Rosenroth and Robert Fludd in the seventeenth century.

The reasons for this collapse still require analysis. Our present discussion of Christian Kabbalah in *DOP* suggests that it may be necessary to look more closely into early modern linguistic philosophies. I suspect, in fact, that some strains of Christian Kabbalah essentially lived and died along with metaphysical linguistic philosophy, and that therefore a considerable wealth of Christian Kabbalah may have heretofore been ignored because it is not sufficiently obviously Kabbalistic to be included in the standard historical account.

Rewriting Ritual Magic

In *DOP*, the consummation of all ritual magic is to effect transparent communication between God and the magus. Ideally, the magus becomes a nexus between God and the World. Linguistically, we might say that God writes His message upon the magus, and the magus translates that message into the speech of the World. But in *DOP*, as we have seen, there are really

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[138] Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata, seu Doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica atque theologica. . .*, 3 v.-in-2 (Sulzbach & Frankfurt, 1677).

[139] See Allison P. Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrect & Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1995).

[140] See Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gerd Mattenklott, and Christoph Schulte, eds. *Kabbala und Romantik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994).

three kinds of language, each proper to one sphere. As a general rule, magical power over nature employs celestial forces to control the natural; that is, the magus *writes* his effects into the celestial, which in turn *speaks* them into nature. Thus the conception of God writing and the magus speaking is incorrect, shifted one place in the system of three worlds and three languages: it would be more accurate to say that (1) God *communicates* with the magus in the divine language of silence and transparency, (2) the magus *writes* that message celestially, and (3) the demonic hierarchy *speaks* the message into being in nature.

This is the supreme case, where the magus here has succeeded in the highest manner possible, an idealized picture of the perfect magus. Most magical rituals, however, are intended primarily to achieve this effect, and do not depend on its prior completion. For the normal magician, the forces manipulated are *mediate*, demons rather than God. Further, the demons cannot *communicate* in the divine manner, but require exterior signs, fixed in space. In addition, they cannot *speak* in a way understandable to us: "But with what senses those spirits and demons hear our invocations, and prayers, and see our ceremonies, we are altogether ignorant."[141] Therefore under normal circumstances, a ritual is a *written* message sent to the demon to enable communication. Ritual techniques and symbols are thus a language which clothes the magician's intentions, desires, and purity of purpose in signs comprehensible by demons.

My claim that ritual language in *DOP* is written does not depend exclusively on the linguistic abilities of demons; more interestingly, this magical ritual language has certain characteristics associated with writing, although one should not overstretch the analogy.

First, the ritual signs are fixed in space, made up of concrete, physical signs. At the same time, it may be pointed out that the ritual is also fixed in time, a characteristic normally associated with speech as against writing. Against this argument, I want to point to two factors which further the written interpretation. One is the fact that the time of the ritual *is itself a sign*, as indicated by the extended discussions of favorable times in *DOP*; we can thus understand the time of the ritual as part of its place, a place governed by favorable stars. In addition, the temporal aspect of the ritual can be understood to parallel the physical act of writing, which has little or no bearing on the interpretation of the text—that is, we cannot generally

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[141] *DOP* III:23, 468/530; chapter not in W.

interpret a written text by presuming that it was written in exactly the order of its final formation, but rather ignore any editing or revisions and simply take the final text as a fixed object.

The second written-like characteristic of ritual language is the disjuncture of the final text from its author, which entails that interpretive control is in the hands of the recipient, rather than the producer. Once the signs are formed, the interpretation of the message is entirely up to the demons—the magus cannot correct misinterpretations. This is one of the dangers of demonic magic: if you get the signs wrong, the demons will not act according to your intention, but only according to the instructions actually given, rather like a computer program. Indeed, if the ritual is badly written, either (1) the demons will not understand that they are bound to interpret and obey it, in which case the ritual has no effect; or worse (2) the wrong sort of demons will take the opportunity to *pretend* that the ritual was correctly written, at which point the magus is likely deceived by them, and begins down the slippery slope to perdition.

Third, the signs are graphically (spatially) divisible: each sign has its own meaning, and can be interpreted separately. While the totality of the text has meaning, each element can be analyzed separately; indeed, individual analyses make up many chapters of *DOP*. Further, note that the order of the ritual receives no particular treatment in *DOP*, implying that such subdivision is normal to the linguistic function of magic.

Once the ritual is written by the magus and read by the demons, we may note that the demons essentially respond in writing. First, they may write effects into the world—being celestial or divine, they do not *speak* their effects, as noted above. Second, they may produce prophecy or oracles: this should be understood as writing, since interpretive control does not remain with the message's demonic producer, but is rather interpreted at the magician's leisure. There is even some indication that it is common to use a proxy for basic prophecy, an assistant who is essentially the slate upon which the demons write their prophetic messages.[142] Third, in frenzy and ecstasy, the demons write upon the magus's soul; it is not so much that they communicate anything to him in a normal sense, but that they write effects, just as in other circumstances they write effects into the world.

As mentioned at the outset, I believe this approach to ritual as writing has broader application than *DOP*, or even Renaissance ritual magic. To begin

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[142] In some texts, the medium is often a prepubescent boy—virgin parchment indeed!

with, it is important that divination and prophecy are among the most common forms of "magical" ritual, however "magic" be defined. In Tambiah's speech-act approach, divination is marginal, a special case; my sense is that a theory of magic which cannot treat divination is fundamentally unsound, rather like a theory of religion which ignores ritual. As we have seen with *DOP*, both in the ritual magic per se and in the mathematical magic, divination is readily understood as writing, and indeed is rather difficult to interpret otherwise. Thus the ritual-as-writing approach goes some way toward clarifying the centrality of divination in magic.

Second, this approach assists in rethinking the importance of space in ritual. Ritual, like writing, is fundamentally spatial, not temporal, and thus thinking of ritual as writing makes the centrality of space *logically necessary* rather than a peculiarity. In other words, a written approach to ritual makes the spatial focus *normal*, even predictable; it is something which *explains* the nature of ritual, not something requiring explanation.

Finally, the instruction "write" is extremely common in magical rituals, as Jonathan Z. Smith has noted in the Preisendanz corpus of Greek Magical Papyri.[143] By interpreting magical ritual as writing, this prevalence of writing *within* ritual becomes evidentiary.

[143] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 26.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

> If any, therefore, through his incredulity or dullness of intellect, doth not obtain his desire, let him not impute the fault of his ignorance to me, or say that I have erred, or purposely written falsely and lied, but let him accuse himself, who understandeth not our writings; for they are obscure, and covered with divers mysteries, by the which it will easily happen, that many may err and lose their sense; therefore let no man be angry with me, if we have folded up the truth of this science with many enigmas, and dispersed it in divers places, for we have not hidden it from the wise, but from the wicked and ungodly, and have delivered it in such words which necessarily blind the foolish, and easily may admit the wise to the understanding of them.
>
> — Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*

There are two ways to perform an analysis by close reading of a text like *DOP*. First, one might construct a kind of parallel exegesis, with running commentary alongside a new, corrected translation. The advantage of this method is that every section of the work is considered, nothing left out, and the biases and prior conclusions of the scholar are, if not eliminated, at least partially suppressed; the great disadvantage, of course, is that the resulting analysis is unreadable. Second, one can begin with a few axes to grind, a few issues at stake, and selectively analyze those pieces of the work which seem relevant; so long as the scholar's predetermined queries are passably compatible with those of the work in question, this produces an analysis which sacrifices coverage (and tedium) for depth.

As should be obvious, I have attempted the second method. The advantage of this is that the reading can be relevant to experts in more than one field; whether the reading is also readable is not for me to judge.

I have organized these conclusions in three sections, based upon their possible interest to differing fields. In the first section, I briefly restate the general outline of the reading, then return to the problem of *De vanitate*

with respect to *DOP* and Agrippa's thought. In the second section, I examine this reading's broader implications for early modern historians of ideas. The final section considers potential theoretical and methodological ramifications, returning to the broad questions which framed our reading in chapter one.

Agrippan Interpretations

Scholarly assessment of *DOP* has been predominantly negative. When Agrippa's writings are granted intellectual value, it is usually in reference to *De vanitate*, though recent scholarship has also argued for the value of the numerous minor orations and theological texts.[1]

The standard criticism of *DOP* is that it is incoherent in one or more of several possible ways. Lynn Thorndike, whose focus was always upon the relation between magical thought and the rise of experimental science, put this most succinctly:

> . . . [*DOP*] is a disappointing book. It is not a practical manual or even a general theory of the subject but merely a literary description and review, full of what the author doubtless flattered himself was erudite allusion and humanistic eloquence. . . . [Agrippa] has read widely in its [magic's] past literature and [*DOP*] is valuable in a scattering way for its bibliography. Yet even in this respect he has failed to achieve anything like an exhaustive or systematic review.[2]

This reading of *DOP* as a sort of compendium of quotations is not surprising, as the work bristles with references, usually unattributed,[3] but the major criticism is that *DOP* is unoriginal, a compilation of other writers' ideas with no argument or focus.

At the same time scholars have implied that the radically demonic orientation of *DOP* pushes it out of the range of acceptable discourse, and

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[1] The latter demonstration makes up the central purpose of Marc van der Poel, *Cornelius Agrippa, the Humanist Theologian and his Declamations* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

[2] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 5:133-34.

[3] On the fact that Agrippa does not often give references, as Charles Nauert rightly notes, "The practice of citing one's ancient authorities explicitly but at second-hand, while discreetly failing to mention the medieval [or contemporary, I would add] sources from which one had really drawn information, was a standard practice of Renaissance authors," although he admits that "Agrippa was a flagrant offender in this respect" (Nauert, 239).

justifies its exclusion from the historiography of ideas. Finally, the apparent disagreement or disjuncture between the 1526 *De vanitate* and the 1531/33 *DOP* has been used as proof-positive that Agrippa was not a coherent or systematic thinker, and as such anything he argued or claimed need not be taken seriously.

In this book, I have tried to counter all of these claims at once, by arguing the coherence, consistency, and sophistication of Agrippa's magical thought. Perhaps the most important point is consistency: throughout, *DOP* harps on its several issues, and discusses them in a rigidly logical fashion. Indeed, consistency itself appears to be a fundamental methodology in *DOP*, as we have seen in the peculiar and sometimes pedantic tendency to follow any principle logically to its ultimate conclusions, no matter how unorthodox or dangerous.

This tendency toward extreme consistency is perhaps most noticeable in *DOP*'s emphasis on demonic magic. In Book I, the defense of demonic magic in *DOP* is based on strict and logical consideration of intelligence and its manipulation, and avoids the internal inconsistencies which marked Ficino's and Trithemius's definitions. In Book II, this same argument extends into the celestial and mathematical sphere, and the intersection of intelligences with Forms in a supra-natural and extra-temporal context leads at least partly to that book's fixation on writing, particularly as an instrument in demonic magic. In Book III, the discussion of demonic magic is taken to its logical extreme: the superiority of demonic magic over natural magic is so great that demonic magic becomes a means to achieve union with God.

In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss remarked that "the first difference between magic and science is . . . that magic postulates a complete and all-embracing determinism."[4] Lévi-Strauss, inspired by his reading of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, suggests that science is fundamentally modest in its claims, that scientific analysis ceases at a certain culturally-determined point—to use Evans-Pritchard's example, the scientist knows that a granary fell down because of wind, termites, and dry rot, and so concludes his analysis. The magician, however, continues the logic relentlessly: he demands to know why the granary fell down on someone. Not just *someone*, in fact—why did the granary fall on *that* someone? In

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press & Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 11; I thank Jonathan Z. Smith for reminding me of this passage.

theory, such a logic cannot end short of omniscience, of a divine understanding of all things simultaneously and how they all intersect and interact.

Whether or not Lévi-Strauss's idea, or Evans-Pritchard's, is an accurate picture of magic's underlying logic—and it is worth renewed consideration—this demand for extreme logical consistency is a central element of *DOP*'s magic. Although at times the logic is specious, *DOP* simply cannot be read as inconsistent or incoherent. In essence, *DOP* presumes consistency within the universe itself, that the apparently unrelated laws of Creation reduce to a few absolutely generalizable principles, and further that these general principles *must* apply in *every* circumstance. And in the end, all such principles reduce to one—or rather to One.

The principal difficulty in reading *DOP*, then, is that this absolute consistency requires evidence, leading to encyclopedic—and often tedious—lists of facts. Further, *DOP* uses this very tedium to mask unorthodoxy. We have seen on several occasions that a long and rather dull series of chapters, apparently containing only paraphrased citations, conceals a subtle and often radical argument, the very pedantry of the format making the argument seem obvious and unremarkable. I suggest, however, that this pattern is not simply a "defense mechanism" (to use Frances Yates's unfortunate phrase) against potential persecution of the author; on the contrary, I think that *DOP* makes many of its most exciting arguments hard to find in order to preserve these secrets from the eyes of the foolish. If only "the wise" will discover the secrets of magic in *DOP*, then wisdom is partly connected with a willingness to read closely.

At the very beginning of this book, I noted that Agrippa referred to a "secret key" to *DOP*. Given the grand structure of the work, the secret key could hardly be some trick, some sleight; it would have to be a fundamental principle of occult knowledge and philosophy, a principle itself hidden and occult. The key must have the grandest possible cosmic significance, and at the same time be a methodological principle which guides the entirety of the magician's quest. Furthermore, this key would need to be obvious, something which could not possibly be denied, something of which a "wise" reader would, upon realizing it, say "Of course!" In sum, Agrippa's "secret key" cannot be anything other than faith in Christ.

On Occult Skepticism

The other great difficulty in scholarship on Agrippa's thought has been the famous "retraction" of *DOP* which appears in *De vanitate*.[5] In chapter two, I discussed a number of the theories which have been proposed to deal with this retraction, and suggested that the solution is twofold: first, the retraction is simply not as general and sweeping as it appears; second, the skeptical thrust of *De vanitate* in no way disagrees with the occult philosophy. In the wake of our close reading of *DOP*, I would like to resume the main points of this latter argument.

De vanitate argues a comprehensive Christian and Pyrrhonist skepticism. Human knowledge is fundamentally flawed, because each supposed fact depends on another, leading to infinite regress. Furthermore, all theoretical knowledge which depends upon the senses or reason is intrinsically incapable of breaking out of this epistemological prison, because sensory data are unreliable, and reason requires reliable data if it is to draw reliable conclusions. In short, all intellectual efforts are impotent before the fundamental absence of absolutes, indeed the fundamental absence at the core of the universe. Given this bleak picture of intellectual endeavors' impotence, argues Agrippa, we can only discard our vain and fruitless pseudo-learning and prescind from the search for Truth. In its place, we can only have faith in Christ, the Word of God, who promised that if we asked for bread, we should not be given a stone.

Such is, in brief, the central argument of *De vanitate*. It is an argument within the mainstream of the Renaissance skeptical revival, in which movement the book played a noteworthy part. From our present point of view, it should be noted that Descartes's *cogito* does not answer the objections which *De vanitate* proposed; indeed, Descartes seems not to have recognized that the problem of infinite regress applies to rationally constructed data. As such, the value of the *cogito* as an absolute datum collapses in the face of Agrippa's full-blown skeptical epistemology.

But the parallel between Descartes and Agrippa is worth pursuing. Of particular value here is the dual nature of the Cartesian project, made up of analysis and synthesis. In the analytical portions of the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Meditations*, Descartes moves inwards, applying his methodic doubt in a logically descending chain of supposed knowledges, none of which stand up to destructive skepticism. At the end of the

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[5] *De vanitate* 48:104-5/141-2; the text appears on page 46 above.

analytical process, however, Descartes is left with one fact which *cannot* be doubted—the "I" which does the thinking—*cogito ergo sum.* With that one indubitable given, Descartes works synthetically to reconstruct all knowledge and philosophy. He establishes the existence of God, which guarantees the reality and validity of sensory data, then moves outward and upward with the synthetic reconstruction.

Agrippa's project is not at heart dissimilar. *De vanitate* should be read as the first two of Agrippa's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, concluding with one indubitable given: the Incarnate Word. *DOP* is the synthetic portion of the project, rebuilding and reconstructing knowledge and philosophy upon the capstone of Christ. The apparent disagreement between *De vanitate* and *DOP* is thus primarily an effect of the difference between analysis and synthesis.

One of the obvious questions to ask of Descartes's synthetic project is whether the philosopher is actually consistent to the method he has described. That is, is every synthetic point really impregnable to the methodic doubt that produced the *cogito*? The same question may legitimately be asked of Agrippa: is it certain that every point made in *DOP* requires no axioms or assumptions apart from the Incarnation?

Throughout the present book, I have traced the ways in which *DOP* connects the occult and manifest principles and facts of the spheres with the certainty of the Incarnation. I have also tried to show that, from a linguistic-philosophical stance, the Incarnate Word actually makes a rather clever solution to problem of skeptical epistemology, in that it not only serves as an absolute datum for Nature and the Divine, but also establishes a metaphysical connection between the two by revealing a potentiality for language to achieve Truth through the Word.

Nevertheless, I can hardly claim that *DOP* ultimately achieves its synthetic goals. Just as Descartes needed his rather shoddy proof for the existence of God in order to progress beyond the *cogito*, and thereby inserted another unwarranted assumption, so Agrippa assumed that the reality of the Incarnation validated Scripture as a datum, and thereby precipitated the occult philosophy back into the prison of language.

In the Introduction I claimed that *DOP* seeks a way out of logocentrism, out of the absence which haunts language and reality, and that the solution is perhaps itself the ultimate logocentrism; I think that the analysis bears this out. In the present context, we may add that it is *De vanitate* which exposes the absence, and proposes the Christian solution which guides the entirety of *DOP*. Any future assessment of the

philosophical worth of Agrippa's philosophical project must recognize that, like Descartes's, it has two parts. While one might legitimately argue that the analytical *De vanitate* is more successful in achieving its goals than is the synthetic *De occulta philosophia*, this is not evidence against Agrippa as a philosopher—after all, the same can be said of Cartesian rationalism.

Historical Speculations

If we have now established *DOP* as a coherent and sophisticated philosophical statement, it remains to be seen what (if any) effect this has on the historiography of early modern intellectual currents. I cannot hope to project all the possible ramifications of a revised reading of *DOP*, nor do I wish to suggest that the present reading necessitates radical reinterpretation of early modern intellectual history in general. Instead, I shall make a series of quick guesses about possible implications for particular areas of the history of ideas.

The impact of *DOP* upon the history of early modern magic is fairly obvious, although as noted before scholars have been wary of granting it the importance it deserves. One difficulty is simply that there are few scholars whose intellectual focus is magic, and most of these few bring to the field assumptions and priorities drawn from the history of science or philosophy. Furthermore most of those in this nascent discipline of the History of Magic seem primarily interested in thinkers later than Agrippa; at least partly inspired by Frances Yates, they orient their studies of magical thought around Giordano Bruno most especially, and to a lesser degree Dee, with Fludd, Ficino, Pico, and Cardano considerably behind. Further, historians of magic are generally not theoretically oriented; they consider themselves historians in a relatively classical sense, and are leery of the admittedly deep pitfalls of "high theory."

I intend that the present analysis pose a challenge to historians of magic. We need to reread Bruno and Dee, bearing in mind that they read Agrippa and furthermore were deeply interested in and influenced by his work. One can already see, I think, how our understanding of Bruno's *ars memorativa* as internal writing (*scriptura interna*[6]) might change in light of a sophisticated magical-written semiotic. Similarly, Dee's *Monas hiero-*

[6] Giordano Bruno, *De umbris idearum . . . Ad internam scripturam, & non vulgares per memoriam operationes explicatis* (Paris, 1582).

oglyphica will require rethinking, as Dee claimed for this single hieroglyphic sigil the possibility of a restitution or restoration of all knowledge and language.[7]

This rereading of the history of magical philosophies will necessarily have some impact on the history of philosophy more generally. I have already argued that Agrippa's project has close parallels to Descartes's, and this connection may in time expand our understanding of the skeptical revival. In addition, there is growing scholarly interest in early modern linguistic and semiotic philosophies, and I suspect that our reading of the history of speculations about language can be deepened by recognition of the part which magical philosophy played in that history.

A similar effect will apply, though less directly, in the history of early modern science. For example, there has so far as I can tell been little attempt to consider the details of Agrippa's influence on Paracelsus, although the latter certainly read Agrippa—indeed, he even entitled one of his own works *De occulta philosophia*![8] Considering the importance in Paracelsian thought of the "Book of Nature," it seems entirely possible that portions of the Paracelsian corpus may be clarified by comparison to an Agrippan understanding of the text/nature relation.

Theoretical Meditations

At the outset of this book I proposed that the various theoretical and methodological positions be used not only as lenses for examining *DOP*, but also as conversation partners for *DOP*'s projected magus. Over the course of the analysis, this conversation has come to include a wide range of thinkers, both Agrippa's contemporaries and our own, from a broad spectrum of disciplines and schools. As yet, however, the magus who occasions this imagined conversation has not responded, apart from very

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[7] Nicholas H. Clulee's analysis in *John Dee's Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988) is excitingly frustrating in this respect: Clulee takes the analysis to the very edges of a theoretical, semiotic understanding of the *monas*, then stops. A "theory-headed" re-examination will certainly be necessary.

[8] Paracelsus [Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim], *De occulta philosophia*, in *Paracelsus sämtliche Werke nach der 10Bändichen Huserschen Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Bernhardt Ascher, 10 vols.-in-4 (Jena: Verlag v. Gustav Fischer, 1932), 9(4).292-326. One might also consider Paracelsus's discussion of sigils (*Siegeln*) and characters for use in amulets: *Archidoxis Magica*, in ibid., 10(4).897-962.

intermittent asides. In this final section, the time has at last come for the Agrippan magus to address the other thinkers at this odd symposium.

Hermetic Hermeneutics and History

Linguistic philosophy has played a significant role in this study, largely because *DOP* is deeply invested in a linguistic-philosophical project. In suggesting possible implications of this reading for (post)modern linguistic philosophy, I must acknowledge my own lack of expertise—I am not trained as a linguistic philosopher. At the same time, making sense of *DOP* has required some rethinking of linguistic issues, which may be of value for scholars so trained.

The primary point I would like to draw attention to is the issue of what I have termed analog signification (page 138 above). In Agrippa's magical semiotics, the ultimate range of a sign's possible motivation is unlimited; that is, a given sign can be locked to its referent to such a degree that manipulation of the sign has corresponding effects on the referent. While such a conclusion depends upon a metaphysics which can no longer be accepted, the idea that signification need not be thought in binary terms is worth consideration.

As a simple example, suppose we have a cat and several signs which refer to that cat. It is apparent that the spoken word /'kat/ and the written "cat" refer to the animal in different ways, and that "Fluffy" refers to her in yet another; all this is quite ordinary semiotics. Suppose we also have several iconic signs: a stick-figure drawing of a cat, a simple sketch, and a photograph of Fluffy herself. Can it be said that the photograph refers *more strongly* than the stick-figure? That is, is it a more *effective* way of referring to Fluffy? If it is further recognized that modern semioticians and linguistic philosophers are continually breaking down the arbitrary barriers between icon, index, and symbol, is there any *a priori* reason to assume that only icons have this range of referential power? If more than one mode of referring is employed—if the photograph has a label, for example—what effect does this have on the sign's power?

In fact, the fundamental issue here is the sign's "power." Outside of a magical semiotic, in which this power is potentially quite tangible, what would it mean to say that one sign is more powerful, or effective, or efficient, than another?

This is not, I think, a question that can be dismissed easily. As I have argued (page 135), the logocentric criticism of writing as "distant" already

implies that some signs are weaker than others. Most traditionally, the claim is that speech has presence while writing has only absence. But if more recent linguistic philosophy has granted that *all* language is haunted by absence, then a binary distinction between presence and absence cannot be maintained. At the same time it is clear that signs do not refer to *all* referents; thus it seems valid to say that, with respect to Fluffy at least, "cat" is a stronger sign than "dog." We can go farther—both "cat" and "dog" are pets, and thus presumably *both* are stronger with respect to Fluffy than is "teacup," not to mention an abstraction such as "magic." Thus there is some reason to think that signs can be more or less "powerful," but this notion of "power" has yet to be clearly formulated as part of the sign. I suggest that Agrippa's analog signification—which is theorized in various ways by many early modern linguistic philosophers—offers valuable resources for thinking the power of the sign.

I would like to conclude by posing a peculiar question. In the Introduction, I discussed Jacques Derrida's famous essay "Plato's Pharmacy," and remarked on Derrida's failure to mention Theuth's invention of magic (page 25). I think this absence points to a more general issue: the occult haunts the margins of Derrida's work. Ghosts, haunting, specters—these metaphors are used constantly. In good Derridean fashion, then, we should ask what is signified by this common thread in deconstruction's rhetoric.

Three avenues for investigation suggest themselves to me; it seems not unlikely that all three are closely intertwined. First, if (as I shall suggest in the next and final section) writing and magic are somehow conceptually linked, it is hardly surprising to find that magic makes its spectral presence known in philosophical discourse on writing. Second, a great part of Derrida's philosophical project has been to continue the overthrow of modernist metaphysics, whose outlines were most powerfully delineated in the early seventeenth century; as such, it is not intrinsically odd that the sixteenth century philosophical movement which was almost entirely destroyed by modern philosophy and science—I refer of course to magic—still haunts the margins of philosophical memory. Third, it is worth considering the periodic resurfacing of magical thought in philosophy after Descartes (Schelling's fascination with Lurianic Kabbalah leaps to mind), which might provoke us to wonder whether magic has always played the role of modernism's ghostly other.

I cannot project the conclusion of this magical deconstruction of deconstruction; I do believe, however, that this is a point at which early

modern intellectual historians can play a role in modern philosophy. In general, such historians have been reluctant to involve themselves in "high theory," and thus have not had much impact on recent philosophical speculation. This reluctance is unfortunate, having at times hampered historical scholarship, as suggested above in my discussion of Agrippa in the history of magic, science, and philosophy. Indeed, by avoiding "theory," early modern intellectual historians have also perhaps deprived philosophers and theorists of insights which may prove of fundamental importance.

Writing Magic

In the Introduction I suggested that a reading of early modern magical thought might help clarify a hoary old problem in the history of religions and anthropology, the definition of magic. In chapter four, I added a sketch of a possible rethinking of ritual theory on written-semiotic lines (page 241). In this final section, I would like briefly to outline the ways in which the present analysis of *DOP* may assist in reopening the question of magic. I have no intention of proposing a new theory or definition of magic as such; rather, I would like to sketch a way to move the question forward which may prove more profitable.

Let me begin by granting some force to the social construction theory of religion and ritual, which is to say that "religion" and "ritual," as ordinarily employed, are categories which primarily revolve around social spheres. Further, I accept provisionally that social interaction is ordinarily based upon and parallel to *speech*. I suggest, then, that we can clarify the oppositive nature of definitions of magic by postulating a similar connection between magic and writing.

Definitions of magic are very commonly negative, based on opposition: magic is the bastard sister of science, magic is illicit religion. A similar negative rhetoric is often applied to writing: writing is an imitation of memory, writing is a supplement to speech. But this notion famously deconstructs itself: writing is a supplement to speech, in that it is unnecessary and exterior to speech, but simultaneously necessary. For this very reason, it is also despised and suspected by the very people one would expect to valorize it, such as philosophers and academics. Suppose, then, that magic is defined as a supplement to religion; unnecessary and exterior, despised, but always already a haunting and needed figure on the margins of religion. And yet, that last sentence is just as accurate—and as

inaccurate—if we replace "religion" with "science." In a sense, magic is the writing of mainstream intellectual culture.

Let me clarify this gnomic remark. Suppose we imagine a broad intellectual sphere involving science and religion, not only the site of their contestation and intersection but also the totality of cultural life as dominated by these two general categories; we might call this broad sphere "mainstream intellectual culture." Now all the constituents of mainstream intellectual culture thus defined are founded upon deep and essentially inevitable logocentric assumptions: it is hard to imagine the scientific or religious pundits of the present-day or early modern worlds surrendering all claims to knowledge and communication with the extra-human (Nature in itself, the divine) as flatly unworkable, useless, founded upon absence rather than presence. So if mainstream intellectual culture of modern and early modern Euro-American culture is at heart rooted in a fallacious metaphysics of presence, parallel to speech in a logocentric conception of language, *what written specter haunts Europe?*

The answer, I suggest, is magic.

The problem with this abstraction is that the categories are not commensurable. "Religion" and "science" are modern second-order constructs, abstract scholarly categories with no "real" existence elsewhere. "Magic," on the other hand, seems to be a cross-cultural category with first-order utility. Furthermore since our present focus is on magic as a *practiced* phenomenon, not an artifact of social cleavages, we find that magic (or its apparent categorical parallels) in each culture has its own history, its own mythology, its own distinctive culture. Thus a purely abstract categorical definition will not suffice to cover "magic" in its lived cultural reality.

At the same time there is a relatively simple solution to this problem. Although "magic" begins as an oppositional label, an abstraction which carries the same valence as writing with respect to speech, that label once applied is often embraced by members of the culture in question. If magic begins as something which "they" do, very soon there will be a "they" who do in fact practice magic. And from that moment, magic has a history, and begins immediately to diverge from a simple abstraction.

This is not, let me hasten to add, an historical account. We are unlikely ever to find this inaugural moment, when "magic" ceases to be merely a label and becomes a lived practice, for the same reasons that we are unlikely to uncover evidence of the mythical "invention" of religion. But I suggest that the constant interaction of mainstream intellectual

culture with those who embrace "magic" will generally ensure that the term retains some germ of the abstraction.

From a methodological and theoretical standpoint, this interaction must also be recapitulated constantly in scholarly analysis. On the one hand, there is no value in a definition of magic which cannot embrace actual magical practices; for this reason the social cleavage model is of little utility for magic in general, despite its value in the analysis of witchcraft in particular. At the same time, a purely historical and culturally specific description cannot serve a broad definitional function, as there is no reason to suppose that such a description will be generalizable. Thus a scholarly analysis of magic must continually cycle between "magic" as label and "magic" as practiced cultural reality, and through the operation of this hermeneutic circle we may begin to generate a functional *scholarly* category of magic.

My suspicion, as stated before, is that magical thought and practices will always be in some way bound up with the nature of writing. Thus practices which readily submit to analysis as written forms—divination being the most obvious—will tend to be those conventionally labeled "magical." Such practices, and their practitioners, will tend to be implicated in many of the same effects which seem bound up with the nature of writing: on the social level the common prestige awarded to literacy will be paralleled in the prestige—awe, terror, etc.—associated with magical practices, while at the semiotic level, we will tend to find analysis by division and an association with temporal control.

The fact that writing necessitates and permits close reading, the process of breaking down and rebuilding a text in order to make it mean, often has the effect of making magicians appear to analyze their practices in a manner too often linked simply to the modern Western world. We "know" that the natives do not think the way we do, that they do not analyze their rituals and practices in the way a modern scholar does; the fact that magicians often seem to do so threatens this facile self-superiority (expressed romantically in terms of "what we have lost") and may be partly responsible for the neglect of magical thought in the history of religions.

At the same time, the oppositive structure of magic in the abstract is inherently threatening, not only to modern scholars but to mainstream intellectual culture in general. Again, we may draw a parallel to writing: writing threatens an intellectual culture which depends upon the metaphysics of presence, because writing makes obvious the absence at the heart of language. In a similar way, perhaps, magic makes ob-

vious—makes present, even—the instability of naturalistic and religious metaphysics. In this sense, it is not surprising that *DOP* seems at times to predict recent philosophical developments: Agrippa's occult philosophy was founded upon questioning, taking advantage of, and overcoming the weaknesses inherent in the very foundations of modern thought.

APPENDIX ONE

LATIN QUOTATIONS, *DE OCCULTA PHILOSOPHIA*

De triplici elementorum ratione consideranda (*DOP* I:4, 90-91/10)

Quatuor itaque quae diximus sunt elementa, sine quorum notitia perfecta nullum in magia producere possumus effectum. Sunt autem singula triplicia, ut sic quaternarius compleat duodenarium et, per septenarium in denarium progrediens, ad supremam unitatem, unde omnis virtus et mirabilis operatio dependet, fiat progressus.

Primo igitur ordine elementa pura sunt, quae nec componuntur, nec mutantur, nec patiuntur commixtionem, sed incorruptibilia sunt et non a quibus, sed per quae omnium naturalium rerum virtutes producuntur in effectum; virtutes illorum a nullo explicari possunt, quia in omnia possunt omnia: haec qui ignorat ad nullam mirabilium effectuum operationem pertingere potest.

Secundi ordinis elementa composita sunt, multiplicia et varia et impura, reducibilia tamen per artem ad puram simplicitatem; quibus tunc ad suam simplicitatem reversis, virtus est super omnia complementum dans omnium operationum occultarum et operationum naturae: et haec sunt fundamentum totius magiae naturalis.

Tertii ordinis elementa haec primo et per se non sunt elementa, sed decomposita, varia, multiplicia et inter se invicem permutabilia; ipsa sunt infallibile medium, ideoque vocantur media natura, sive anima mediae naturae: paucissimi sunt qui illorum profunda mysteria intelligant. In ipsis per certos numeros, gradus et ordines est consummatio omnis effectus in quacunque re naturali, coelesti et supercoelesti; miranda sunt et plena mysteriis quae operari possunt in magia tam naturali quam divina: per ipsa enim omnium rerum ligationes, etiam solutiones et transmutationes et futurorum cognitio et praedicitio, etiam malorum daemonum exterminatio et bonorum spirituum conciliatio ab illis descendit.

Sine his igitur triplicibus elementis eorundemque cognitione nemo confidat se in occultis magiae et naturae sceintiis quicquam posse operari;

quicunque autem haec in illa, impura in pura, multiplicia in simplicia reducere noverit, eorundemque naturam, virtutem, potestatem in numero, gradibus et ordine sine divisione substantiae discernere sciverit, is facile obtinebit omnium naturalium rerum et coelestium secretorum scientiam et operationem perfectam.

De sermone atque virtutibus verborum (*DOP* I:69, 231-32/211)

Ostenso itaque nunc in animi affectibus magnam residere virtutem, sciendum insuper est non minorem inesse verbis rerumque nominibus, maximum praeterea in sermonibus et orationibus complexis: quibus potissimum a brutis differimus et rationales dicti sumus—non a ratione, quae secundum animam accipitur, quam capacem affectuum appellant, quam Galenus dicit etiam bruta animalia nobiscum habere communem, licet alia magis, alia minus. Sed rationales dicimur a ratione quae iuxta vocem in verbis et sermone intelligitur, quae vocatur ratio enunciativa, qua parte caeteris animantibus maxime antecellimus: nam λόγος Graecis et rationem et sermonum et verbum sonat. Est autem verbum duplex, internum videlicet et prolatum: internum verbum est conceptus mentis et motus animae, qui in cogitativae potentia sine voce fit, quemadmodum dum in somniis nobis loqui et disputare videmur et in vigilia etiam silentes saepe totam aliquam percurrimus orationem. Verbum autem prolatum quendam in voce et locutionis proprietate actum habet et cum anhelitu hominis, oris apertione et sermone linguae profertur; in quo parens natura corpoream vocem et sermonem menti et intellectui copulavit, enunciativam et conceptuum intellectus nostri interpretem illam faciens ad audientes, de quo nobis hic dicendum est. Sunt itaque verba aptissimum medium inter loquentem et audientem, deferentia secum non tantum conceptum, sed et virtutem loquentis energia quadam tansfundentia in audientes et suscipientes, tanta saepe potentia, ut non immutent solummodo audientes, sed etiam alia quaedam corpora et res inanimatas. Illa autem verba prae caeteris maioris efficaciae sunt quae res maiores (puta intellectuales, coelestes et transnaturales) cum expressius tum mysteriosius repraesentant quaeque a digniore lingua et sanctiori dignitate instituta sunt: haec enim veluti signa quaedam et repraesentationes seu sacramenta rerum coelestium et supernaturalium vim obtinent cum ex virtute rerum explicatarum, quaerum vehicula sunt, tum ex vi insita illis a virtute instituentis et proferentis.

De observationibus quibusdam coelestibus et practica quarundam eiusdem imaginum (*DOP* II:50, 370-73/402-04)

Modo narrabo tibi observationes corporum coelestium quae requiruntur ad practicam aliquarum eiusmodi imaginum. Sic ad fortunandum aliquem conficimus imaginem in qua haec fortunata sunt, scilicet illius significator vitae vitaeque datores et signa et planetae; fortunemus praeterea ascendens et medium coeli et eorum dominos; item locum Solis et locum Lunae, partem fortunae atque dominum coniunctionis vel praeventionis ante suam nativitatem factae, planetas malevolos deprimendo. Si vero ad calamitatem imaginem fabricare voluerimus, e converso agemus atque quae hic fortunata, ibidem infortunata locemus, stellas maelvolas erigendo.

Simili modo fac pro fortunando loco aliquo vel regione vel civitate vel domo; similiter pro destruendo vel impediendo aliquo supradictorum fiat imago sub ascensione illius rei, quam destruere vel impedire volueris, et infortunabis dominum domus vitae illius, dominum ascendentis et Lunam, dominum domus Lunae et dominum domus domini ascendentis et domum decimam et dominum eius. Pro adaptatione autem loci alicuius pone fortunas in ascendente eius et in domo prima et decima et secunda et octava fotunabis dominum ascendentis et dominum domus domini ascendentis et fortunabis Lunam et dominum domus Lunae.

Ad fugandum vero animalia certa a certis locis, ut in eis generari vel habitare vel persistere non possint, fiat imago sub ascensione illius animalis quod fugare voluerimus et ad similitudinem illius: ut si fugare velimus scorpiones ab aliquo loco, fiat imago scorpionis, ascendente signo Scorpionis cum Luna, et infortunabis ascendens et dominum eius et dominum domus Martis; et infortunabis dominum ascendentis in octava; et iungantur aspectu malevolo, opposito vel quadrato; et inscribantur in imagine nomen ascendentis et domini eius et Lunae nomen et nomen domini diei et nomen domini horae; et fiat fovea in medio loci, a quo eos pellere volueris, et afferatur in illa de terra accepta ex quatuor angulis loci eiusdem et sepeliatur ibidem imago, capite deorsum, imprecando sive proferendo: "Haec est sepultura scorpionum, ut non ingrediantur istum locum;" et sic de similibus.

Item pro lucro fiat imago sub ascendante nativitatis hominis vel sub ascensione illius loci, cui lucrum addicare volueris, fortuna ascendens et dominum eius et facias dominum domus secundae, quae est domus substantiae, iunctum cum domino ascendantis in trino vel sextili sitque

inter eos receptio; fortunabis undecimam et dominum eius et octavam; et si poteris, pone partem fortunae in ascendante vel secunda; et sepeliatur imago in loco illo vel deferatur ab illo, cui lucrum addicare voluerimus.

Item pro concoria et amore fiat imago in die Iovis, sub ascendente nativitatis illius quem vis amari, fortuna ascendens et decimam et absconde malos ab ascendente et habea dominum decimae et undecimae planetas fortunae, iunctos domino ascendentis ex trino vel sextili cum receptione; deinde fac aliam imaginem, videlicet pro illo quem vis incitare ad amandum; considera si sit amicus vel sodalis illius quem vis amari: et si sic, fiat imago sub ascensione domus undecimae ab ascendente primae imaginis; si vero fuerit uxor vel marius, fiat sub ascensione septimae; si frater vel soror vel consanguineus, fiat sub ascensione tertiae et sic de similibus; et pone significatorem ascendentis secundae imaginis iunctum significatori ascendentis primae imaginis sitque inter eos receptio sintque caetera fortunata, ut in prima imagine; post iunge simul ambas imagines in amplexum, vel pone faciem imaginis secundae ad dorsum imaginis primae; et involvantur in sindone et deferantur vel sepeliantur.

Item ad successus petitionum et pro adipiscenda re denegata, sive ab alio accepta vel possessa, fiat imago sub ascendente illius qui petit rem et fac dominum secundae iunctum cum domino ascendentis a trino vel sextili sitque inter eos receptio et si fieri potest sit dominus secundae in signis obedientibus et dominus ascendentis in imperantibus; fortuna ascendens et dominum eius et cave ne sit dominus ascendentis retrogradus vel combustus vel cadens vel in domo oppositionis, hoc est in septima a domicilio suo, non sit impeditus a malis, sit fortis et in angulo; fortunabis ascendens et dominum secundae et Lunam; et fac aliam imaginem pro eo apud quem est quot petitur et incipe eam sub ascendente pertinenti ad eum: ut si sit rex vel princeps, incipe sub ascendente decimae domus ab ascendente primae imaginis, si pater sub quarta, si filius sub quinta et sic de similibus; et pone significatorem secundae imaginis iunctum cum domino ascendentis primae imaginis a trino vel sextili et ipse recipiat eum et pone utrosque fortes et fortunatos absque impedimento; fac omnes malos ab eis cadentes; fortunabis decimam et quartam si poteris, vel aliquid eorum; et cum fuerit perfecta secunda imago, iunge eam cum prima, facie versus faciem, et involve in linteo mundo et sepeli in medio domus illius qui petit rem, sub significatore fortunato fortuna forti sitque facies imaginis primae versus septentrionem vel potius versus locum ubi moratur ille apud quem est quod petitur, vel si contingat petentem perfere ad eum apud quem est res petita, deferat imagines secum quousque pergit.

<Et fit etiam imago somniorum quae posita sub capite dormientis vera somnia efficaciter praestat de quacunque re animus iam antea deliberaverit: figura illius est figura hominis dormientis in sinu angeli, quam facies ascendante Leone, Sole in Ariete nonam domum tenente; tum in pectore hominis inscribes nomen desiderati effectus, in capite autem angeli nomen intelligentiae Solis. Fit eadem imago ascendante Virgine, Mercurio in Ariete in nona domo fortunato aut ascendantibus Geminis, Mercurio fortunato et in Aquario nonam tenente, sitque a Saturno felici aspectu receptus, inscribiturque nomen spiritus Mercurii. Fit eadem etiam ascendante Libra, Venere in Geminis in nona domo a Mercurio recepta, inscribendo angelum Veneris; et fit adhuc eadem imago ascendente Aquario, Saturno in exaltatione sua quae est in Libra, nonam feliciter possidente, et inscribitur angelus Saturni; fit adhuc etiam ascendente Cancro, Luna in Piscibus a Iove et Venere recepta et in nona domo feliciter constituta et inscribitur spiritus Lunae.

Et fiunt etiam annuli somniorum mirabilis efficaciae: et sunt annuli Solis et Saturni et constellatio eorum est quando Sol aut Saturnus in exaltationibus suis in nona domo ascendunt et quando Luna Saturno iungitur in nona domo et in eo signo quod fuit nona domus nativitatis; et inscribitur annulis nomen spiritus Solis vel Saturni et infigitur lapis sua imagine insculptus, radice aut planta subiecta secundum regulam quam alibi tradidimus.>

Et haec de imaginibus dicta sufficiant: nam plua eiusmodi nunc per te ipsum investigare poteris. <Illud autem scias nihil operari imagines eiusmodi, nisi vivificentur ita quod ipsis aut naturalis aut coelestis aut heroica aut animastica aut daemoniaca vel angelica virtus insit aut adsistat. At quis modo animam dabit imagini et vivificabit lapidem aut metallum aut lignum aut ceram atque 'ex lapidibus suscitabit filios Abrahae'? Certe non penetrat hoc arcanum ad artificem durae cervicis nec dare poterit illa qui non habet: habet autem nemo, nisi qui iam cohibitis elementis, victa natura, superatis coelis, progressus angelos, ad ipsum Archetypum usque trascendit, cuius tunc cooperator effectus potest omnia, sicut de hoc dicemus in sequentibus.>

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APPENDIX TWO

DE VANITATE ON ALCHEMY

As I have noted periodically, there are a number of textual difficulties regarding *De vanitate*. To the best of my knowledge there is at present no critical edition, which is unfortunate indeed, and has perhaps contributed to the work's being relegated to the backwaters of early modern intellectual history.

In writing this book, I have endeavored to use the most accurate version of *De vanitate* possible, requiring tedious comparison of numerous editions, word by word. The vast majority of the thousands of textual differences are merely printing errors, spelling differences, and other irrelevant trivia. In a few cases, however, apparently quite minor lacunae have turned out to have considerable significance, rewarding the present author in some slight degree for his pains.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable edition of *De vanitate*. The version which appears in the Latin *Opera* is one of the worst, which is a great pity since it is comparatively readily available. Marc van der Poel notes in passing that the earliest editions include the phrase "invictus haereticus Martinus Luterus" (one of twenty-one condemned passages) in the section on the inquisitors' art; slightly later editions include "invictus haereticus" only, and still later editions drop the passage entirely. While two of the editions used include the complete phrase, there is no reason to assume that they are necessarily more scrupulously typeset than later editions, and as such one cannot assume that an earlier edition is a better one.

It has been suggested that a complete translation and critical apparatus be added to the Latin presented here, as the text "is too difficult even for specialists in the field." While I sympathize with this wish, and agree heartily that a good translation is necessary, I am precisely the sort of specialist who finds it difficult. What is needed is a reliable translation and critical edition of the entirety of *De vanitate*, executed by an adept Neo-Latinist able to discern the subtleties of Agrippa's verbiage and style. The complexity and interest of the chapter on alchemy is not, I think, atypical

of *De vanitate* in general. In my close reading in chapter two above, I did not choose the text for its style, but rather its subject-matter. Thus it is probable that a careful, critical rendering of the complete text will recover unsuspected depths of meaning. Now that *De vanitate* can be read in light of *DOP*, as I think Agrippa intended, I hope that specialists will return to the texts with fresh eyes and a greater willingness to read Agrippan Latin with the care it requires.

In preparing the text, I have simply indicated variations in the notes, and provided what I think is the likeliest reading in the text. Variant readings attested more than once are indicated by underlining. As a rule, I prefer the earlier editions, especially H, and have retained the spelling habits of the *editio princeps*, with consistent spelling variations indicated in the notes at the first occurrence. The various editions are indicated in the notes by letters; except as noted, "early editions" are Pr., H, A, and D; "late editions" are Op., B, and C.

Editions of De vanitate

Pr.: ❧SPLENDI - DÆ NOBILITATIS VIRI ET - armatæ militiæ Equitis aurati ac vtriusque Iuris - Doctoris Sacræ Cæsareæ Maiestatis a consilis - & archiuis Inditiarii Henrici Cornelii Agrip - pæ ab Nettesheym De Incertitudine & Va - nitate Scientiarum & Artium atque - excellentia Verbi Dei - Declamatio. Antwerp, 1529, unpaginated. The *editio princeps* of *De vanitate*.

H: ❧HENRICI - CORNELII AGRIPPÆ - Ab Nettesheym, splendissimae - nobilitatis Viri, & armatae mi - litiae Equitis aurati, ac LL. - Doctoris, sacrae Caesareę - Maiestatis a Cõsilijs, & - archiuis Indiciarij, de - Incertitudine & Va - nitate Scientiarum - & Artium, atq; - excellẽntia Ver - bi Dei, decla - matio. - ❦ [n.p., n.d.]. Pace Prost (2.533, no.25, cf.509) this is Antwerp, 1531.

A: HENRICI COR-NELII AGRIPPÆ AB NETTES-heym. De incertitudine & Vanitate scientiarum - declamatio inuectiua, nouissime ab eodẽ - autore recognita, & marginalibus - Annotationibus aucta. 1539 [n.p.].

D: HENRICI CORNE - LII AGRIPPÆ AB NETTES - heym, De incertitudine & vanitate scientia - rum declamatio invectiva, denuo ab - autore recognita, & marginali - bus annotationibus aucta.

1539 [n.p.], unpaginated. Pace Prost (2.533, no.26) this would appear to be an edition from Paris; according to Caillet (no.87) there is a 1537 n.d. & n.p. edition which is equivalent.

Op.: Agrippa, *De incertitudine & vanitate scientiarum atque artium declamatio inuectiua, seu Cynica, qua docetur, Nusquam certi quicquam, perpetui & diuini, nisi in solidis Dei eloquijs atque eminentia verbi Dei latere*, in *Opera*, vol. 2.

B: HENRICI CORNELII - AGRIPPÆ - AB NETTESHEYM, - DE INCERTITUDINE ET - vanitate scientiarum declama-tio invectiva, ex postre-ma Authoris reco-gnitione. Cologne: Apud Theodorum Baumium, sub signo Arboris, 1584, unpaginated.

C: HENRICI CORNELII - AGRIPPÆ - AB NETTESHEYM, - De Incertitudine & Vanitate - omnium Scientiarum & Artium Li-ber, lectu plane jucundus & elegans . . . . Hagae - Comitum, Typographia Adriani Vlacq, 1662.

Cap. 90: De Alchymia[1]

Alchymia itaque, sive ars, sive fucus, sive naturae prosecutio dici debeat, profecto insignis est eademque impunis impostura cuius vanitas eoipso se facile prodit cum polliceatur quae natura nullo modo pati potest nec attingere cum tamen ars omnino[2] non possit naturam superare, sed illam imitatur & longis passibus sequitur & multo fortior sit vis naturae quam artis, Alchymia autem

> Ars suspecta probis ars ipsa invisaque multis
> Invisos etiam cultores efficit artis,
> Mendaces adeo multi manifeste videntur
> Qui seipsos aliosque simul frustrantur inertes.

Dum rerum vertere species tentant ac benedictum quendam philosophorum (ut vocant) lapidem fabricare praesumunt, quo Midae instar contacta omnia corpora ilico in aurum argentumve permutentur quin etiam e summis inaccessisque coelis quintam quandam essentiam deponere nituntur, qua iam non solum plures quam Croesi divitias, sed &

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[1] Early editions have no chapter numbers or titles. Spelling of "alchymia" depends on edition: *Op.*, B and C have *Alcumistica* and *Alcumista*; early editions A and D use *alcumistica* or *alcumista* in the text, but in the margins A has *alchymia*/ *alchumista* and D *alchimia*/ *alchimista*. Pr and H read *alchymia*/ *alchymista* throughout.

[2] Pr and H have *omnis*.

depulso senio reiuvenescentiam perpetuamque sanitatem ac tantum non immortalitatem una cum ingentibus opibus nobis pollicentur

At nusquam tantos[3] inter qui talia curant,
Apparet ullus qui re miracula tanta
Comprobet.

Sed medendi aliquot experimentis tum ex cerussa, purpurissa, stibio, sapone, consimilibusque pigmentis, ac muliebribus fucis vetularumque incrustationibus, & cuiusmodi sacrae literae vocant, unguenta meretricia stipem corrogant,[4] quo Gebericam instruant[5] officinam, unde in proverbium demum abiit: Omnis Alchymista vel Medicus, vel Saponista credulorum hominum aures verbis ditant, pecunia inanes ut reddant loculos: Et quibus ipsi spondent divitias ab his drachmas petunt, hinc se palam prodit hanc artem esse nullam, sed ingentes nugas & insanae mentis inania commenta, Inveniunt tamen tantae foelicitatis percupidos homines quibus miro ingenio sese maiores divitias consecuturos in Hydrargyrio quam natura praestet in auro persuadeant, & quos iam terque quaterque deceptos semper novis praestigiis incautos denuo fallant, & prodigiosa hac impostura cogant follibus auram[6] impellere fornacibus, nulla dulcior insania quam fixum volatile tum volatile fixum fieri posse credere, sic teterrimi[7] carbones sulphur, stercus ac venena lotia & omnis dura poena est vobis melle dulcior, donec praediis, mercibus, patrimoniis omnibus decoctis; & in cinerem, & in fumum conversis dum longi laboris praemia, & nascituros fetus aureos perpetuamque cum reiuvenescentia sanitatem sibi molliter pollicentur devoratis multo tempore & sumptibus tum primum vetuli; annosi, pannosi, esurientes, semper sulphur olentes, & inter carbones atra fuligine sordidi assiduaque argenti vivi contrectatione, paralitici solius nasi adfluentia divites, caeterum adeo miseri ut pro tribus assibus etiam animam venalem habeant, quam metallis inferre conabantur Metamorphosim in seipsis experiuntur effecti iam ex Alchimicis Cacochimici, ex Medicis mendici, ex Saphonistis Cauponistae ludibriumque populi stultitiaque patens & fabula vulgi, & qui iuniores in mediocritate vivere contempserunt per omnem vitam Alchimistarum fraudibus expositi, iam senes facti in summa paupertate mendicare compelluntur, ac in tanta calamitate constituti pro favore & misericordia,

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[3] All early editions (Pr, H, A, and D) have *tantos*, late editions (Op., B, C) have *totos*.
[4] Early editions *corrogant*; late editions generally *colligunt*, although B has *corrigent*.
[5] Early editions except D have *instruant*; late editions and D have *instituant*.
[6] Early editions *auram*; late editions *aurum*, which destroys the sense.
[7] Early editions except D have *teterrimi*; late editions and D *deterrimi*.

insuper contemptum risumque reportant, paupertateque coacti saepe ad malas artes, & monetae adulterationem, aliaque falsificia degenerant, ideoque haec ars non modo a Republica Romanis legibus pulsa, sed etiam sacrorum canonum decretis in tota Christiana ecclesia prohibita est, quod si & hodie omnibus qui absque singulari Principis indulto Alchymicam exercent regno ac provintiis interdiceretur, addita etiam bonorum proscriptione corporisque afflictione, profecto non tot adulterinos nummos haberemus quibus hodie fraudantur ferme omnes magno Reipublicae detrimento. Hanc ob causam puto Amasim regem Aegyptiis olim legem tulisse qua cogebatur unusquisque destinato magistratui rationem reddere quo se foveret artificio, quod qui non faceret poena illi erat extremum supplicium. Permulta adhuc de hac arte (mihi tamen non admodum inimica) dicere possem, nisi iuratum esset (quod facere solent qui mysteriis initiantur) de silentio. Eoque praeterea a veteribus philosophis atque scriptoribus tam constantissime religioseque observato, ut nullus uspiam probatae autoritatis philosophus, ac fidus scriptor comperiatur qui huius artis alicubi vel solo verbo meminisset, quae res plaerosque induxit ut crederent omnes eius artis libros recentiori aevo iampridem confictos, cui non modicum adstipulatur ipsa authorum Geberis Morieni Gilgilidis[8] ac reliquae eorum turbae obscura, & a nullis aliis celebrata nomina cum rerum quibus utuntur absona vocabula, tum sententiarum ineptitudo, philosophandique ratio perversa. Sunt tamen qui aurei velleris pellem interpretentur fuisse librum chimicum,[9] veterum more in pelle conscriptum in quo auri conficiendi scientia contineretur, cuiusmodi[10] libros apud Aegyptios qui huius artis peritissimi fuisse dicebantur cum Diocletianus magna diligentia conquisisset omnes exussisse legitur, ne comparatis divitiis aurique copia fidentes Aegyptii Romanis aliquando bellum inferre auderent atque exinde hanc artem publico Caesaris edicto semper habitam flagitiosam, verum nimis longum foret narrare omnia huius artis stulta mysteria, ac inania aenigmata de Leone viridi, de Cervo fugitivo, de Aquila volante, de stulto saltante, de dracone caudam suam vorante, de buffone inflato, de capite corvi, deque illo nigro nigrius nigro, de sigillo Hermetis, de luto stultitiae (sapientiae dicere debui) ac similibus nugis innumeris: Denique de illo unico solo

[8] This is the list as it appears in Pr. and A; H equivalent except *Gilgidis*; late editions have *Giberis*; C has *Gilgildis*.

[9] All editions except Pr. and H read *alchimicum*.

[10] Early editions *cuiusmodi*; late editions *eiusmodi*.

praeter quod non est aliud ubique tamen reperies[11] benedicto sacratissimi Philosophorum lapidis subiecto videlicet (pene nomen rei effutivi cum periurio sacrilegus futurus) dicam tamen circumlocutione, sed obscuriore ut non nisi filii artis & qui huius mysteriis initiati sunt intelligant, Res est quae substantiam habet nec igneam nimis, nec prorsus terream, nec simpliciter aqueam, nec acutissimam, nec obtusissimam qualitatem sed mediocrem & tactu levem & quodammodo mollem vel saltem non duram, non asperam, quin & gustu[12] quodammodo dulcem, olfactu suavem, visu gratam, auditu blandam atque iucundam, cogitatu laetam,[13] plura dicere non conceditur, atque sunt tamen iis maiora, sed ego hanc artem (ob eam quae secum mihi familiaritas est) illo honore potissime dignam censeo, quo probam mulierem definit Theucydides illam inquiens optimam esse de cuius laude vel vituperio minimus esset sermo, illud dumtaxat addam Alchymistas omnium hominum esse perversissimos siquidem cum praecipiat deus, *in sudore vultus vescendum esse pane suo*: & alibi dicat per Prophetam: *Labores manuum tuarum quia manducabis, ideo beatus es, & bene tibi erit.* Hi divini praecepti promissaeque beatitudinis contemptores procul labore,[14] & (ut aiunt) in opere mulierum & ludo puerorum aureos montes moliuntur. Non inficior ex hac arte multa admodum egregia artificia ortum habere traxisseque originem. Hinc Azieri[15] Cinnabrii Minii purpurae & quod aurum musicum vocant, aliorumque colorum temperaturae prodierunt, huic aurichalcum & metallorum omnium mixtiones, glutimina & examina & sequestrationes debemus, bombardae formidabilis tormenti inventum illius est, ex ipsa prodiit vitrificatoria nobilissimum artificium de qua Theophilus quidam pulcherrimum librum conscripsit. Narrat autem Plinius Tiberii Caesaris tempore excogitatum vitri temperamentum quo flexibile & ductibile fieret, sed eius officinam a Tiberio abolitam quin ipsum quoque tantae industriae artificem (si Isidoro creditur) neci datum idque Factum ne aurum pro vitro vilesceret & argento atque aeri sua praemia detraherentur. Sed de iis satis.

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[11] Early editions except A have *reperibili*; all late editions *reperies*. A has *reparabili*.
[12] Early editions *gustu*; late editions *gestu*, which is clearly incorrect.
[13] Only Pr. and H have *laetam*, all other editions *latam*; the former is certainly correct.
[14] Late edtions except Op. *laborare*.
[15] Pr., A and D all *Azieri*; H reads *Azuri*. Late editions read *acieri* which is unlikely.

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